

**DISENGAGING FROM INSURGENCIES:
INSIGHTS FROM HISTORY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AFGHANISTAN**

BY

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14. ABSTRACT

To determine insights for future disengagements, this thesis examines four historical episodes in which Western nations withdrew from on-going conflicts against insurgent-like enemies. Relatively unsuccessful results flowed from the British withdrawal from Aden during the 1960s and the American withdrawal from Vietnam during 1972-1973. As the last British troop departed Aden, a state of turmoil prevailed. Not only could the insurgents realistically claim victory in evicting the British by force, but also the territory later became the Arab worlds first Marxist state and a base for terrorists. Americas departure from Vietnam produced similar disappointment. Less than three years after the Americans departed, insurgents combined with a North Vietnamese conventional assault to shatter the South Vietnams defenses and united the countries under communism. More successful outcomes occurred during the British withdrawal from Malaya in the 1960s and the American withdrawal from El Salvador in 1988-1989. After World War II, the British attempted to reestablish colonial control of Malaya and faced resistance from communist insurgents. In the midst of their counterinsurgency, the British government granted Malaya independence in August 1957. The Malayan government, backed by British support, continued its struggle against the communist insurgents for another three years. The Malayan government announced victory in 1960 and began to enjoy a relatively peaceful and prosperous aftermath. From kidnappings, assassinations, and other political-criminal activities, an insurgency emerged in El Salvador in 1979. As the movement transitioned to guerrilla warfare, the insurgent fighters rivaled the strength of the Salvadoran security forces. From 1980-1992, the government of the United States provided El Salvador extensive funding for social and political reforms, military material support, and training to counter the communist insurgents. These efforts, coupled with effective El Salvadoran governance, eventually led the communists to abandon their cause. The El Salvadoran government has since preserved a legitimate, enduring democratic government and husbanded a growing economy. This historical examination revealed that nations can successfully disengage from confronting insurgencies on foreign soil. Success requires a significant reduction of the insurgents military capability. The indigenous government must develop or maintain its autonomy and independence from the supporting nation. The merger of political and military efforts creates the reciprocating benefits of sound governance and enduring security. A strong political leader amplifies these developments and further reduces the insurgencys attractiveness. Host nations must develop indigenous capabilities, while advisors must avoid the pitfall of mirror-imaging. When the indigenous government establishes its self-sufficiency and legitimacy, the supporting nation can announce its withdrawal without further empowering the insurgency. These historical insights are transferable to the current Afghanistan situation. vi While the Afghanistans future remains undetermined, the United States can make decisions to foster a successful disengagement. Which course America takes in Afghanistan depends on the wisdom, courage, and vision of both Americans and Afghans. Getting it right will not be easy, but it can happen.

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Army, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major James M. Kimbrough IV graduated in 1990 from Fayette County High School in Fayetteville, Georgia. After a year at the University of Georgia, he entered undergraduate studies at the United States Military Academy at West Point, NY. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in International Relations in June 1995 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry in the US Army.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The initial idea for this thesis emerged during an office call with Dr. James Kiras to discuss my third topic proposal. As I struggled to refine my interest, we discussed the recent announcement of America's SOFA agreement with Iraq, which included a withdrawal date. Attempting to divine Iraq's future, we discussed the outcomes of previous counterinsurgencies. Dr. Kiras quickly made me realize that I lacked an understanding of how previous irregular conflicts ended. From this musing, I became interested in historical insights that might apply to Afghanistan.

From there, I owe my sincere appreciation to my thesis advisor, Dr. Harold R. Winton. His vast historical knowledge provided an extensive list of previous conflicts that I might want to consider exploring. Although I felt frustrated at the time, I now value his Socratic approach to help me narrow my cases and to develop my basic assertions. His guidance and tireless support during this research project motivated me throughout the year. Finally, Dr. Winton's thorough review of my numerous drafts provided critical feedback, refined my ideas, and greatly improved my writing mechanics.

Finally, but foremost, my love, thanks, and deepest gratitude go to my family. My wife, Jennifer, never complained about my long hours spent reading, writing, or revising. I remain in awe of her ability to juggle the responsibilities of being a wife, mother, daughter, and volunteer. My sons, James and Charlie, may never understand how much I enjoyed their interruptions. I needed those breaks to play backyard baseball; to build a fort from blocks; to read a Dr. Seuss book; or to finish last in Mario Kart. I only wish I could have taken more timeouts.

ABSTRACT

To determine insights for future disengagements, this thesis examines four historical episodes in which Western nations withdrew from on-going conflicts against insurgent-like enemies.

Relatively unsuccessful results flowed from the British withdrawal from Aden during the 1960's and the American withdrawal from Vietnam during 1972-1973. As the last British troop departed Aden, a state of turmoil prevailed. Not only could the insurgents realistically claim victory in evicting the British by force, but also the territory later became the Arab world's first Marxist state and a base for terrorists. America's departure from Vietnam produced similar disappointment. Less than three years after the Americans departed, insurgents combined with a North Vietnamese conventional assault to shatter the South Vietnam's defenses and united the countries under communism.

More successful outcomes occurred during the British withdrawal from Malaya in the 1960s and the American withdrawal from El Salvador in 1988-1989. After World War II, the British attempted to reestablish colonial control of Malaya and faced resistance from communist insurgents. In the midst of their counterinsurgency, the British government granted Malaya independence in August 1957. The Malayan government, backed by British support, continued its struggle against the communist insurgents for another three years. The Malayan government announced victory in 1960 and began to enjoy a relatively peaceful and prosperous aftermath. From kidnappings, assassinations, and other political-criminal activities, an insurgency emerged in El Salvador in 1979. As the movement transitioned to guerrilla warfare, the insurgent fighters rivaled the strength of the Salvadoran security forces. From 1980-1992, the government of the United States provided El Salvador extensive funding for social and political reforms, military material support, and training to counter the communist insurgents. These efforts, coupled with effective El Salvadoran governance, eventually led the communists to abandon their cause. The El Salvadoran government has since preserved a legitimate, enduring democratic government and husbanded a growing economy.

This historical examination revealed that nations can successfully disengage from confronting insurgencies on foreign soil. Success requires a significant reduction of the insurgent's military capability. The indigenous government must develop or maintain its autonomy and independence from the supporting nation. The merger of political and military efforts creates the reciprocating benefits of sound governance and enduring security. A strong political leader amplifies these developments and further reduces the insurgency's attractiveness. Host nations must develop indigenous capabilities, while advisors must avoid the pitfall of mirror-imaging. When the indigenous government establishes its self-sufficiency and legitimacy, the supporting nation can announce its withdrawal without further empowering the insurgency. These historical insights are transferable to the current Afghanistan situation.

While the Afghanistan's future remains undetermined, the United States can make decisions to foster a successful disengagement. Which course America takes in Afghanistan depends on the wisdom, courage, and vision of both Americans and Afghans. Getting it right will not be easy, but it can happen.

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INTRODUCTION

War's objective is victory – not prolonged indecision. In war, there is no substitute for victory. – General Douglas MacArthur

How long is it worthwhile to suffer – and to inflict – further casualties and destruction in order to accomplish the initial objectives of fighting?
– Fred Charles Ikle in *Every War Must End*

For the first time in its history, the United States is simultaneously engaged in two major engagements on foreign soil against insurgent adversaries. Uneasy with the progress in Iraq and ambivalent about the situation in Afghanistan, the nation elected a president campaigning on a promise to change radically the handling of these conflicts. Prior to President Barack Obama's inauguration, the United States and Iraq reached an agreement calling for a withdrawal of all American forces by the end of 2011.¹ In Afghanistan, President Obama has inherited a war against a resilient enemy with no immediate end in sight.

America's previous engagement in counterinsurgencies suggests strongly that eventually all or most of American forces will withdraw from Afghanistan. This disengagement may come about because our efforts have been successful and a relatively stable, prosperous, and representative government has been established in Afghanistan with the Taliban and regional Al Qaeda threats effectively neutralized. Or it may come about because our efforts have been insufficiently successful to warrant continued expenditure of blood, treasure, and political capital. To enhance the likelihood of the former, historical insights derived from the previous experience of democratic societies withdrawing from insurgencies in foreign countries can yield useful insights for America's military and political leaders. This thesis seeks to glean such insights.

Background and Significance of the Problem

While American and Iraqi political leaders have determined a policy of gradually ending US involvement in Iraq, the potential withdrawal of American troops from

1. *Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq* (19 November 2008), 15, http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/world/20081119_SOFA_FINAL AGREED TEXT.pdf (accessed 23 January 2009).

Afghanistan remains less certain. US policies and actions can still shape the conditions in and surrounding Afghanistan that would foster a successful disengagement.

Alternately, the American experience in Afghanistan could turn into a Soviet-style quagmire. Examining several historical cases should provide insights that will assist in the proper planning of a successful withdrawal when conditions warrant its implementation. The aim here is to discover guidelines that will foster the prospects of implementing a withdrawal plan that leaves in place a secure, prosperous, and politically viable Afghani government that generally aligns with the furtherance of American interests in South Asia.

Methodology

To uncover these insights, this thesis examines four historical examples in which nations withdrew from on-going conflicts against insurgent-like adversaries. Relatively unsuccessful results flowed from the British withdrawal from Aden during the 1960's and the American withdrawal from Vietnam during 1972-1973. Outcomes that were more successful occurred during the British withdrawal from Malaya in 1960 and the American withdrawal from El Salvador in 1988-1989. By examining these examples, this study hopes to gain insights that can support suggestions for a successful American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

To describe the situations in the respective nations, this study utilizes the four prerequisites for a successful insurgency outlined by David Galula in *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. The first states that an insurgency requires a cause to pry the population away from the government, to mobilize support, to create an identity, and to control its members. Ultimately, a cause exploits an unresolved issue by championing one side's goals for change in the system. Because the insurgency starts from a vulnerable position, a weakened counterinsurgent becomes the second precondition for insurgent success. This weakness can come from internal or external issues but typically hinges on the characteristics of the political regime and its population control mechanism.² The role of geography has proven decisive in many military actions, and a lack of geographic assistance can condemn an insurgency to failure. Thus, certain

2. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CN: Praeger Security International, 2006), 11-23.

geographical characteristics have emerged as the third prerequisite for successful insurgencies. Galula suggests that the insurgent's ideal situation would resemble "a large land locked country shaped like a blunt-tipped star, with jungle covered mountains along the borders and scattered swamps in the plains, in a temperate zone with a large and dispersed rural population in a primitive economy."³ Finally, Galula contends that an insurgency requires outside support to achieve its objectives.⁴ While Galula's analysis focuses on state support, this study will expand his parameters to include transnational organizations in order to account for contemporary trends.

For purposes of this study, the following titles summarize Galula's four broad prerequisites for successful insurgencies: 1) a cause, 2) counterinsurgent vulnerability, 3) favorable geography, and 4) outside support. While these first two prerequisites have almost always proven necessary, Galula notes that necessity of the last two preconditions varies based on the relative strength of the first two conditions.⁵ In order to ensure uniformity of analysis, this study also employs Galula's model in the last chapter to summarize the current situation in Afghanistan.

In examining each historical example, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which factors of Galula's model caused the conflict to develop and spread?
2. What were the goals of the commitment of British/US troops?
3. How did the situation evolve after the commitment of the British/US troops?
4. How did the resolution or lack of resolution of Galula's prerequisites contribute to the decision to disengage?
5. How and under what conditions did disengagement planning and troop withdrawal occur?
6. What long-term consequences flowed from the disengagement?
7. What insights about withdrawal can be gleaned from this analysis?

3. Galula, *Counterinsurgency*, 25.

4. Galula, *Counterinsurgency*, 25-27.

5. Galula, *Counterinsurgency*, 28.

The answers to these questions helped determine notable trends across the chosen historical cases that deserve further consideration for applicability to the Afghanistan situation.

Preview of the Argument

The first two chapters examine historical cases with relatively poor outcomes. When the last British troop departed Aden in 1967, a state of turmoil prevailed. Not only could the insurgents realistically claim victory in evicting the British by force, but also the territory later became the Arab world's first Marxist state and a training base for several terrorist groups.⁶ The United States' departure from Vietnam in 1972-1973 produced similar disappointment. The last American ground forces left South Vietnam in August 1972. Without American logistical and air support, South Vietnam collapsed in 1975 as the North Vietnamese Army's assault shattered its defenses. The communist insurgents combined with a conventional assault to unite the country. Vivid television images of Saigon falling left many Americans feeling stunned and questioning their sacrifices in Indochina.⁷

The next two chapters consider historical instances of relatively good outcomes resulting from the withdrawal from on-going conflicts. The British government granted Malaya independence in August 1957, and the Malayan government and armed forces continued their struggles for another three years against the communist insurgents.⁸ Since the middle of 1960, a stable, freely elected government has enjoyed a relatively peaceful and prosperous aftermath to the brutal guerilla war that plagued it during the Malayan Emergency.⁹ From kidnappings, assassinations, and other political-criminal activities, an insurgency emerged in El Salvador. As the movement transitioned to guerilla warfare, the numbers of insurgent fighters rivaled the strength of Salvadoran

6. Jonathan Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions: The Conflict in Aden," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, Ed. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 165-166.

7. Rufus Phillips, An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned: *Why Vietnam Matters* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 303.

8. John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 103.

9. Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 264.

security forces.¹⁰ From 1980-1992, the government of the United States provided El Salvador extensive funding for social and political reforms, military material support, and training to counter the communist threat. These efforts coupled, with effective El Salvadoran governance, eventually led the communist insurgents to abandon their cause. The El Salvadoran government has since preserved a legitimate, enduring democratic government and husbanded a growing economy.¹¹

The final chapter summarizes the insights from the historical cases. Then, after briefly describing Afghanistan's contemporary situation, it offers guidelines for American and Afghani action derived from these insights.

10. Angel Rabasa et al., *Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations*, RAND Counterinsurgency Study Paper 4 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), xi.

11. Lt. Col. James F. Glynn, "El Salvador, Iraq, and Strategic Considerations for Counterinsurgency" (master's strategy research project, US Army War College, 2008), 5-6.

CHAPTER 1

The British Withdrawal from Aden in the 1960's

The bitter conflict in South Arabia, misleadingly referred to as the *Aden Insurgency*, engulfed most of the south-west portion of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1960s. This included the city of Aden, the entire Protectorate territory, and much of the adjacent kingdom of Yemen. Although referring to the entire territory as “Aden” is as erroneous as “referring to England as London,” the convention has become widely accepted and will be used here.¹

While the eruption of violence in Aden occurred mainly in the 1960's, the events of the previous decades created the tenuous security conditions. Several global forces besieged Great Britain's empire after its victory in World War II. Arab nationalism began to spread, and the Cold War brought increased attention from the United States and the Soviet Union. Domestically, Great Britain suffered from a slumping economy and faced a growing popular desire to leave the region.

This chapter begins by examining the strategic context surrounding and influencing the Aden insurgency. The development and spread of the conflict are then assessed through the application of Galula's model. Subsequently, the chapter highlights the British objectives for the conflict and outlines the changes resulting from the commitment of British troops. Returning to Galula's model, it examines how the failure to effect the counterinsurgency prerequisites contributed to the political decision to disengage from this conflict. The chapter then identifies the long-term outcomes from the withdrawal of British troops and concludes with insights from the Aden insurgency.

Strategic Context of the Aden Insurgency

Historical Influences. The port city of Aden became Queen Victoria's first colonial acquisition in January 1839 when British and Indian troops forcibly occupied it. While it occupied only twenty square miles, the terrain around Aden created a natural fortress. On one side, a sheltered harbor proved capable of handling most transport ships; on the other side, steep mountains surrounded the town with only a few easily defensible

1. Jonathan Walker, *Aden Insurgency: The Savage War in South Arabia 1962-1967* (Staplehurst, UK: Spellmount Limited, 2005), 1.

passes. A semi-desert and nearly unpopulated wasteland lies beyond the mountains.² Eventually, the British entered into a series of treaties with the surrounding tribes and small states to establish a buffer in the hinterland. These agreements created the Aden Protectorate. The official colony measured only 75 square miles, but the Protectorate grew to cover over 112,000 square miles. The entire area roughly equaled the combined size of England and Scotland, including over 700 miles of the South Arabia coast.³ In 1960, the Protectorate states varied in populations from Quaiti with 230,000 to minor sheikhdoms of only a few individuals. The population of the Protectorate totaled almost 700,000 people, and Aden claimed nearly 220,000 inhabitants.⁴

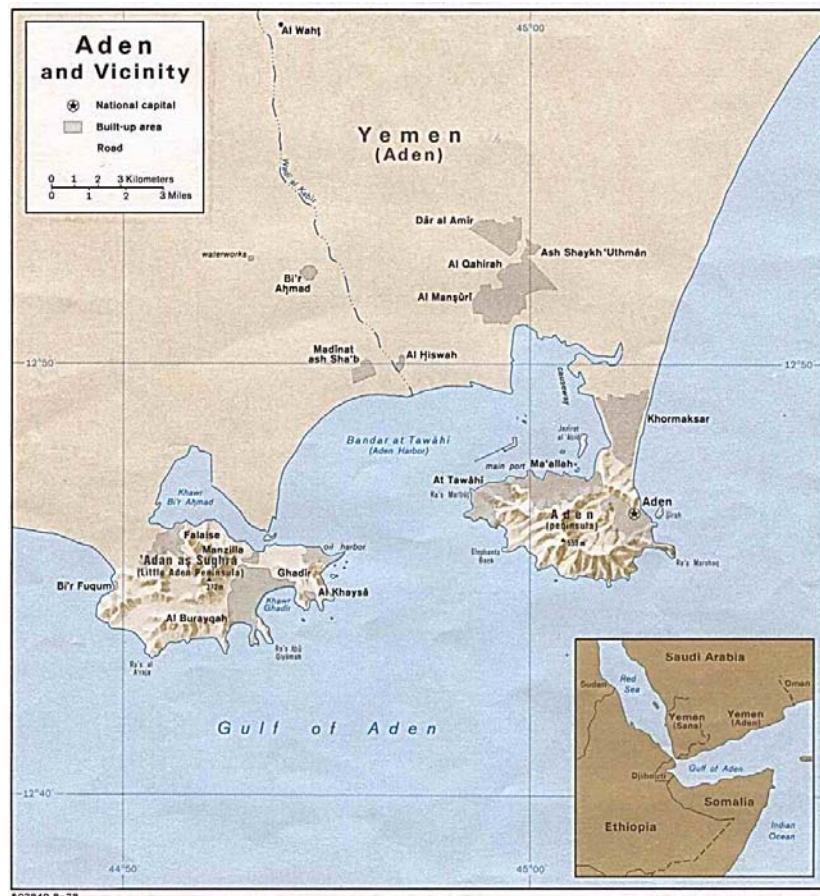


Figure 1 Aden and Vicinity

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *Aden and Vicinity*, 1978, “Perry-Castaneda Map Collection – UT Library Online,” http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_cities/aden.jpg (accessed 22 May 2009).

2. R.J. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule 1839-1967* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), 1-2.

3. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 4.

4. Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Ducker, and Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 8-11.

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Aden became a strategic prize. Steamships found Aden a perfect coaling station in their travels between England and India. The port served later as a refueling point for more advanced ships and a useful staging base for military expeditions into Africa and other parts of the Middle East.⁵ By 1960, Aden followed only London, Liverpool, and New York in the volume rankings of the world's oil bunkering ports.⁶

World War I gave Aden an inglorious role in determining the regional future. On the sea, only a single German commerce raider came within a thousand miles of the city, but Aden's naval facilities helped sustain the constant stream of British vessels traveling through the Red Sea. On land, armies operating from bases in Egypt and present-day Iraq proved influential in defeating the Ottoman Empire. Post-war efforts focused on protecting the Suez with strong bases in Egypt and securing access to the oil fields of Iraq and Persia. With no perceived challengers for influence along the Arabian coastline, Britain's Aden policy focused on containing Arab nationalism.⁷

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the departure of Turkish troops from the peninsula, Imam Yahya of Yemen claimed that all of South Arabia rightfully belonged to his kingdom. He attempted several armed campaigns to claim the territory. Yemeni forces had some initial success in seizing portions of the Protectorate but never posed a significant threat to Aden proper. The active use of British aircraft ensured that even these limited gains were only temporary. This pattern of incursion and retreat was repeated several times from 1921-1928. In February 1934, Imam Yahya agreed to a treaty accepting the borders established by the 1914 Anglo-Turkish agreement.⁸

The success of airpower in defeating the Imam Yahya initiated a significant change in the British defense plans for South Arabia. Unable to support a million-pound sterling request by the War Office for the protection of Aden, the British government granted a request from the Air Ministry to assume responsibility for the land and sea defense of the colony. Using a squadron of 12 bombers, an armored car section, and

5. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 4.

6. Karl Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia: Abandoning Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 25.

7. Gavin, *Aden: Under British Rule*, 250-251.

8. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia*, 22.

local forces, the Air Ministry promised a savings of £100,000 compared to the existing military establishment. In 1927, the Air Ministry assumed responsibility for Aden's defense as the British and Indian troops that had formed the Aden garrison withdrew.⁹

This new strategic doctrine of employing airpower to secure colonial possessions transformed the British view of the Protectorate and proved significant in Aden's future. If the enemy fought at close quarter, the aircraft would quickly become ineffective in protecting Aden. The military command desired a large buffer zone in which to employ aircraft in bombing missions to force an attacking enemy to retreat. This required early warning. The British established an intelligence network throughout the Protectorate by deploying political officers to the most remotely populated areas. To complement the informants and air attacks, armored cars and locally enlisted troops left the security of Aden's walls to establish a defensive screen. This approach required multiple airstrips throughout Aden's hinterland to offset the aircraft's relative short range and mirrored other defense plans established around the Middle Eastern countries by the Royal Air Force.¹⁰

Resolving internal disturbances also became dependent on air assets. When the Protectorate's treaty members faced a revolt, bandits, or other challenges to their rule, they could call on the British for help. The British authorities summoned the wrongdoer to Aden to pay an appropriate fine. Failing to appear meant the Royal Air Force would often bomb the offending party, causing a level of damage equivalent to the imposed fine. Officials provided the offenders advanced notice via leaflets dropped over the targeted area and encouraged the evacuation of women and children. All livestock and humans became legitimate targets after such warnings. This so called "proscription bombing" administered suitable punishment without the necessity of large numbers of security forces and prevented potentially lengthy and costly ground operations. This arrangement gained the support of local leaders in the Protectorate and helped sustain a semblance of order.¹¹

The defense planners also designed a regional strategy heavily dependent on air mobility to counter the challenges of the vast terrain and widely dispersed garrisons.

9. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 22-23.

10. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 281-283.

11. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 24.

Egypt, Iraq, India, and other bases began to enjoy air-based lines of communications for mutual reinforcement. According to one authority, “air routes were replacing sea routes as defensive arteries, along which military units could be shuttled back and forth, especially in the Middle East where the Air Force was in control, and security of landing grounds and airfields was coming to equal importance of naval bases and harbors.”¹²

World War II left Aden and South Arabia virtually untouched. Germany and Italy focused their operations on other parts of the Middle East. Imam Yahya of Yemen remained neutral and concentrated on securing his own kingdom. Continuing the pre-war trend, internal tribal disruptions in South Arabia consumed most of the time and effort of local forces, often requiring augmentation by troops from India and Great Britain. The security of the port facilities in Aden and the political stability of the Protectorate region became important in keeping Great Britain’s vital sea routes through the Red Sea operating smoothly.¹³

Despite barren coffers after the huge demands of World War II, Great Britain desired to maintain its strategic position in the Middle East. The reconstruction effort demanded a steady supply of Middle Eastern oil. The Suez Canal remained the critical sea route for the transportation of goods from Africa, the Far East, and the Persian Gulf area. Egypt ensured access to the Mediterranean Sea and served as a barrier to Soviet expansion into Africa. Aden remained important as the gateway to the Red Sea.¹⁴

Global Influences on the Aden Insurgency. In the 1950’s, British global influence began to wane. Great Britain was economically stressed by its post-World War II reconstruction efforts. India’s independence in 1947 deprived Britain of its traditional reservoir of cheap ground forces. The Middle East became the primary source of American oil, and the United States adopted policies that favored dismantling the British Empire in the region.¹⁵ As Middle Eastern countries gained independence, the countries often nationalized their oil industries and denied British access to their refineries. Aden

12. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 283.

13. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 9.

14. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 9-10.

15. Walker, “Red Wolves and British Lions,” 149.

not only became one of the world's most important oil bunkering ports, but also emerged as a key refinery site for the British.¹⁶

The Cold War furthered Middle East instability. As the United States and the Soviet Union competed to increase their relative influence in the region, states and insurgent groups found eager supporters of their causes. Directly and through surrogates, the two superpowers infused the regional disputes with funding, material, advisors, and public support. Courting the backing of the United States or the Soviet Union, Middle Eastern leaders masterfully manipulated the perceptions of their cause by linking their antagonists with the opposing superpower or by pledging assistance in furthering the supportive superpower's agenda for the area. Even with the looming threat of the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States often disagreed about the appropriate policy toward the Middle East. Often the two nations competed with each other for influence as they sought a steady supply of oil from the newly independent nations.¹⁷

Regional Influences. The events in Palestine in 1948 and around Suez in 1956 contributed to the deterioration of British influence in the region. In Palestine, the British faced the intractable problem of balancing Jewish and Arab interests in the territorial boundaries that had been mandated by the League of Nations in 1922. Vast propaganda machines of both sides legitimized violence aimed at their adversaries, and the British found themselves caught in the middle. Terrorist-like campaigns continued to escalate between the Jewish and Arab communities and claimed over 300 British lives. Faced with choosing between total repression and total withdrawal, Britain announced it was turning the Palestine problem over to the United Nations in May 1948. Despite lingering resentment over the British repressive measures to establish stability and security, both Arabs and Jews felt abandoned by the British withdrawal from the volatile territory.¹⁸

The 1956 Suez incident further eroded Britain's influence in the Arab world. The most damaging aspect was evidence of strong Anglo-French collusion with Israel.¹⁹ Gamel Abdel Nasser became Egypt's president in 1954 and sought to nationalize the

16. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 25-26.

17. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 42.

18. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 89-92.

19. Hinchcliffe, Ducker, and Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia*, 3.

Suez Canal in order to finance the construction of Aswan Dam. English and French diplomatic attempts failed to prevent Egyptian nationalization. Under a dubious claim of necessity, Israeli military forces invaded Egypt to destroy suspected terrorist camps. London and Paris immediately called for the cessation of hostilities. Israel immediately accepted the terms, but Egypt rejected the offer. The English and French used air strikes against Egypt in an attempt to force acceptance of the cease-fire. Despite international protests, four days later the English and French launched an airborne invasion to secure the canal and its vicinity. Threats of Soviet nuclear strikes and US economic sanctions forced all parties to accept UN demands for a cease-fire. The Suez Canal reopened in March 1957 under United Nations control.²⁰

A minor redemption came after Kuwait gained independence from Britain in 1961. The new Kuwaiti government immediately signed a treaty that obliged Britain to come to Kuwait's aid if requested. Within a week of independence, Iraq's ruler proclaimed that Kuwait belonged to Iraq and moved large armored forces toward the border. Upon the request of Kuwait, Great Britain rushed ground, naval, and air forces to counter the Iraqi threat. Deterred by the British presence, the Iraqis withdrew their forces within a few weeks. With their confidence renewed, the British again felt capable of playing a major role beyond the European continent, and Aden was central to the British construct.²¹ The British minister of defense proclaimed that the Kuwait operation became the basis for future defense planning: "Here is really in the long term a fundamental change in policy. It is no longer a concept of British forces dispersed round the world in small pockets, but a concentration on three main bases from which to fan out by air and sea. The bases are Britain, Aden, and Singapore."²²

After his success in the Suez crisis, Egypt's President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, sought to export his version of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East. This vision included the removal of the British presence from Aden and South Arabia. In 1962, Nasser's first stage concluded with an armed coup that removed the ruler of the Yemen Kingdom. In the newly renamed Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), Nasser gained a staging base for incursions into South Arabia against the British and, perhaps, against Saudi

20. Derek Varble, *The Suez Crisis 1956* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 7-8.

21. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 29-30.

22. Quoted in Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 30.

Arabia with its vast oil fields. The YAR, backed by Egypt and the Soviet Union, reasserted its claim to South Yemen and covertly began an insurgency in Aden and the Protectorate. Arab nationalists in Aden and the Protectorate began to echo Nasser's message as they increased the number and frequency of terrorist attacks against the British security forces.²³

With growing unrest, the British attempted to forge more concrete security arrangements with the local tribal leaders in the Protectorate. In accordance with a new treaty, a Federation of South Arabia replaced the old Protectorate in hopes of increasing friendship and mutual co-operation, but the continuation of the British military base in Aden was non-negotiable. The new arrangement gave the rulers an opportunity to express their views in deciding future policy for the region. Additionally, Britain recognized the Federation's desire for economic and political independence.²⁴ The structure of the Federation put the local rulers in absolute control over their traditional tribal areas and allowed them to utilize the substantial funds from the British government with little oversight.²⁵ But by leaving the governing of the tribes to the whims of the local emirs, the British neglected to ensure the development of even the most basic services in Aden's hinterland.²⁶ The Federation agreement failed to bring peace to South Arabia. Unsatisfied by the settlement, the insurgents, aided by their external sponsors, began a prolonged campaign in the desolate regions of the former Protectorate and in the crowded streets of Aden.²⁷

British Domestic Influences. As the situation in the Aden colony deteriorated, Britain's governing Conservative Party became strained. Political leaders, demonstrating a loss of nerve as the stakes and costs of sustaining the empire surpassed their control and comprehension, wavered under the pressure of the controversy and adverse publicity. In October 1964, the Labor Government seized power with a determination to change British policy toward Aden. Blind commitment to the Aden colony gave way to a studied regard for underlying British interests. The military base, while still strategically

23. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 150.

24. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 22-24.

25. Gavin, *Aden: Under British Rule*, 341.

26. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 46.

27. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 150.

attractive, became a secondary consideration in policy deliberations. The Labor government did not desire to prolong an unpopular local regime through the commitment of British forces. Instead of sending additional troops to the colony, the colonial secretary attempted to create a more popular government for South Arabia. As this process proceeded in Aden, domestically the Labor government encountered increasing public resentment over the growing violence and casualties.²⁸

Galula's Model Applied to the Aden Insurgency

As noted earlier, the government normally occupies an advantageous position at the outset of the conflict. Given the government's material superiority, the insurgent must carefully guide his movement until certain preliminary conditions are met. Only through obtaining these prerequisites, can the revolution appear to take off spontaneously and have a realistic chance of success. The conditions in Aden proved fertile for a successful insurgency.

A Cause. As early as June 1963, Adeni dissidents began to form The National Liberation Front for the Occupied South Yemen (NLF). Despite their traditional tribal divisions, the insurgents claimed that all South Arabia belonged to one independent and national unit. Arab nationalism and a distinctive anti-colonial feeling fueled the desire to join the Yemen Arab Republic.²⁹ While Marxists existed within its membership and its rhetoric included terms like 'comrades' and 'imperial lackeys,' the NLF never overtly sought to bring communism to the people of South Arabia. Arab nationalism was the dominant cause that rallied sympathizers to the National Liberation Front.³⁰

Counterinsurgent Vulnerability. The establishment of the Federation created a single political entity for the government of the Aden region. Unfortunately, the Federation never developed an effective political identity. Tribal leaders retained absolute rule of their traditional homelands with little oversight by the British-created administrative structures. Even with a liberal application of British funds, the Federal umbrella never reduced the role of traditionally determined social mechanisms in developing policy or settling disputes. The organization structure was supposed to allow the British to control the region without having to rule directly. The British agreed to a

28. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 346-348.

29. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 47.

30. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 73-74.

defense pact with the Federation members and promised eventual independence in exchange for retention of the British military base. The federal rulers, however, suffered from dwindling influence in their homelands and failed to achieve legitimacy among the growing South Arabian population. The traditional rulers secured power but neglected the wishes of the masses.³¹ The frailty of the British-backed Federation lay fully exposed to NLF attacks.

After the domestic dissatisfaction of 1964, the British Labor government was never fully committed to a long-term presence in South Arabia. Secretary of State for Defense Denis Healy remained convinced that “the paramount interest of the West in the Middle East was not in military bases, but in the political stability and access to the growing oil supplies in the Gulf.”³² The Labor party found the existing Aden policy contrary to its economic goals and social philosophy. From its viewpoint, military power and presence should never jeopardize economic health. By 1966, the Labor party proclaimed, “Britain’s influence in the world depends first and foremost on the health of her internal economy and the success of her export trade.”³³ The Aden government’s legitimacy depended largely on continued British presence and support. Thus, the tenuous support of Aden’s Federation by Britain’s ruling party further reduced the chances of long-term success for the fragile government.

Favorable Geography. Aden’s physical geography proved tortuous for the counterinsurgents. The geography fostered two distinct but closely related kinds of wars for the Federation and British troops. The old Protectorate portion of the colony, dominated by featureless deserts and arid mountain ranges, proved an ideal region from which to launch a revolt. Poor infrastructure denied the Federation’s troops rapid access to the hinterland and allowed the NLF leaders easy movement among the tribal areas. Dispersed throughout the desert expanse, population centers greatly varied in size. The insurgents were accustomed to laboring in the intense heat of the desert and had intimate knowledge of the terrain.³⁴ As in most mountain campaigns, occupiers of the high ground controlled the traffic along the valleys. The terrain favored the insurgents by

31. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 341-342.

32. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 62.

33. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 64.

34. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 73.

creating concealed infiltration and exfiltration routes for ambushers, providing numerous firing positions with adequate protection and fields of fire, and by naturally canalizing travelers in the region to only a few high-speed routes. Most importantly, the border with Yemen contained numerous mountain passes that prohibited effective control of men or machines crossing into the Aden region.³⁵

The city of Aden was a densely packed urban area with over 220,000 inhabitants. With 80,000 Yemenis, 95,000 other Arabs, 20,000 Indians, 20,000 Somalis, and 5,000 Europeans, Aden's demographics complicated the conduct of urban operations.³⁶ The different ethnic groups tended to congregate in tightly knit communities that allowed insurgents to disappear down crowded streets after an attack. Given the close proximity that security forces maintained with the populace and the vulnerability of key governmental infrastructure that necessitated easy civilian access, grenade attacks, sniping, assassinations, sabotage, and other forms of urban terrorism became effective tactics.³⁷ The closely grouped buildings and numerous automobiles provided concealment for small arms caches. Given the ease of traveling between the smaller locations to gather supplies, large arms caches were unnecessary. The sanctuary of local mosques and the loosely fitting traditional clothes of the women also helped conceal weapons and insurgents from the security forces.³⁸ The dense population also facilitated carefully staged riots that lured counterinsurgents into meticulously set traps. The insurgents' careful planning magnified the casualties caused by attacks, incited the security forces to respond repressively, and provided large audiences for demonstrations of governmental weakness. Most importantly, the riots and the government's oppressive reaction provided vivid images for the increasing media coverage to broadcast globally and further the insurgent's propaganda campaign.³⁹

Outside Support. The NLF enjoyed support from several external bodies. The head of British Special Branch in Aden, Bob Waggitt, claimed, "we are fighting a snake...the head is in Cairo, the body wiggles down through Yemen, and the tail is right

35. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 74-76.

36. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 56.

37. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 57-58.

38. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 182-183.

39. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 154 & 158.

here in Aden. Usually we spot the tail and try and trace it back to the head...here it is the other way around. We know where the head is but the tail is slippery.”⁴⁰ In the propaganda realm, Cairo Radio broadcasts, pulsating from towers in Yemen, espoused the Arab nationalism message to the inaccessible towns and hamlets in Aden’s hinterland. The development and proliferation of cheap, easily transportable transistor radios connected the traditionally isolated audience to a larger community in their own land and across the Arab world.⁴¹

Egypt provided the NLF with military assistance. Mirroring Nasser’s revolutionary organization, Egyptian agents guided the organization of the NLF into secret cells. Members of each cell were unknown to the other cells, and only the leader was trusted with the group’s assigned mission and the method to contact the next level of command. Military recruits often travelled to Cairo or Yemen’s border towns to attend training camps. Upon graduation, the insurgents returned home to train other tribe members in guerilla operations. In Yemen, Egyptian intelligence officers supervised armament and explosives shipments across the border and often screened new recruits for the higher levels of NLF command. From their sanctuary in Yemen, NLF leaders enjoyed the benefits of Yemenese and Egyptian intelligence services to guide the planning and execution of their operations throughout the Aden Colony.⁴²

The NLF also enjoyed the indirect support of the Soviet Union. Diplomatically and in United Nations debates, the Soviet ambassadors and delegates routinely condemned the British for maintaining a colonial relationship in order to protect their military and economic interests. This proved especially true for the port of Aden.⁴³ The Soviet Union also forged closer ties with Yemen in order to find a suitable port on the Red Sea.⁴⁴ By 1965, Egypt’s support of Yemen and ability to challenge the Israeli armed forces depended largely on economic aid and weapons deals with the Soviet Union. With Egypt’s large military commitment supporting Yemen, few intelligence experts considered the Egypt capable of attacking Israel. This assessment changed with the

40. Quoted in Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia*, 101.

41. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 333.

42. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 72-76.

43. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 86.

44. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 270.

addition of the most recent versions of Soviet tanks and aircraft to the Egyptian inventory. Due to the Soviet generosity, Nasser was able to continue his opposition to the British in South Arabia and also pose a legitimate threat to Israel's security.⁴⁵

British Goals for Troop Commitment

While the British domestic support eroded and the NLF gained momentum, British military forces began to occupy the town of Aden in unprecedented numbers. The nineteenth century had never seen more than two thousand British and Indian soldiers stationed throughout the settlement. With the Royal Air Force managing the security, the first half of the twentieth century boasted only a few hundred military personnel in Aden. By 1964, Britain stationed more than eight thousand military members with an unknown number of family members accompanying the service members. The base overshadowed almost all other activities in Aden. The increased number of military personnel created doubts about the sincerity of Britain's promise of eventual independence. The swelling numbers of troops satisfied the military's estimates for base security and counterinsurgency operations but clashed with the delicate methods and messages of the British diplomatic efforts to maintain some control of Aden.⁴⁶

The 1963 defense statement justified this growing military presence. The Royal Navy, committed to securing the sea-lanes, agreed to keep two carriers and one commando ship east of the Suez Canal at all times. Aden's port was strategically important to sustaining this commitment. The Royal Air Force continued its mission to assist Kuwait and other allies in the region. Additionally, the Royal Air Force continued its policing efforts in the Aden Protectorate. The Army also considered Aden important to support its Kuwaiti obligations and to deter a future Yemenese incursion. All three services acknowledged the expected independence of Kenya contributed to the growth of British military presence in Aden and its importance for regional commitments, especially to the protection of Kuwait.⁴⁷

The perceived growth in Aden's strategic importance compelled the British to ensure the Federation's survival. The formal agreement establishing the Federation bound Great Britain and the Federal Government in a military alliance in exchange for

45. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 160 & 227.

46. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 344.

47. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia*, 48-51.

British basing rights. In diplomatic discussions, the British emphasized the necessity of retaining the base, which reinforced the Federal Government's desire to sustain the British military presence to combat the increasing support for NLF. Retaining the existing rulers served the needs of both the British and the tribal leaders who sustained their power through the Federation. The fond hope seems to have been that, after the promised independence, a peaceful Aden enjoying the benefits of the anticipated oil revenues could serve as a useful market for British goods.⁴⁸

Situation after British Troop Commitment

Radfan Campaign. Lying sixty miles to the north of Aden and adjacent to the Yemen border, the Radfan territory was a rugged, isolated 400 square-mile tract of desolate landscape. One of the few improved roads through Radfan links the city of Aden to markets of Yemen. This road weaves between the jagged peaks of the surrounding mountains and high hills while crossing several narrow and deep wadis. There were few alternate caravan routes to transport commercial goods out of the port city and raw materials into Aden. The turbulent Yemen border town of Qataba sat astride this important trade route and emerged as an important National Liberation Front sanctuary and supply distribution point.⁴⁹

The first NLF campaign sought to build support for the rebellion in the mountainous regions of Radfan. While the NLF worked the tribal areas with impunity, the Federal troops suffered from severely limited access due to the paucity of roads and their unfamiliarity with the region. In the autumn of 1963, the anti-British movement began as the NLF cadre began coordinating, building, and instructing the recruits in the tribal hinterland. The close proximity to the Yemen border eased the rapid creation of supply caches in the jagged peaks and deep, narrow wadis of the region. The influx of new equipment, combined with a labor pool of tough, fit warriors, used to the hardships of mountain living, gave the NLF a formidable combat force. Of the estimated 30,000 Radfanis, a band of roughly 7,000 fighters joined the NLF.⁵⁰

When this group was sufficiently trained, the local NLF military leader, Ali Antar, used his insurgent forces to disrupt traffic on the road through the Radfan territory.

48. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia*, 56-59.

49. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 74-75.

50. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 74-77.

Between October and December 1963, Ali Antar's men conducted a series of ambushes and mine-laying operations along the road. Additionally, they conducted attacks on Federal Regular Army (FRA) positions, including a 200-man assault on one fort. This outright challenge provoked a Federation and British military response.⁵¹

With inadequate intelligence about the NLF, the military planners decided to quell what they believed was only an old tribal agitation. The aim was to expel the dissidents and to demonstrate that the Federal government had the will and means to enter the Radfan territory whenever it desired. While combat was expected, a portion of the plan included directions to improve a portion of the road to accommodate armored cars and jeeps that would enable future incursions to move more rapidly into the center of Radfan. Despite concerns over a lack of capital investment in other social welfare programs to consolidate the expected military gains, the high commissioner approved the plan.⁵²

Operation Nutcracker commenced on 4 January 1964. Led by a British commander and supported by British tanks, artillery, engineers, and airpower, three battalions of the FRA entered Radfan to fight the dissidents and build the road. Local tribesmen helped build the road during the day and moved to the mountain peaks to snipe at British encampments at night. The road construction represented a great engineering achievement under the harsh environmental conditions. Politically and militarily, however, the effort accomplished little because permanently securing the surrounding high ground required an increase in units stationed in the Radfan territory, an option the Federal government found unacceptable. Control of the road reverted to the insurgent forces of the NLF as the depleted FRA units withdrew at the end of February.⁵³ The NLF tribesmen interpreted the outcome as a victory. After the withdrawal, the NLF increased their attacks in the region and enjoyed increased support from Egypt and Yemen.⁵⁴

Intelligence gaps continued to plague the British and Federal government's operations. Viewing the Radfan rebellion as being tribal-inspired, the leadership failed to perceive any agenda beyond financial grievances. The British failed to realize the

51. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 77.

52. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 77-78.

53. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 151-153.

54. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in Post-Imperial Era*, 52.

existence of an organized insurgency with an attractive agenda. The most serious deficit occurred in human intelligence (HUMINT), which could not penetrate the isolated villages and closed societies of the tribes in Radfan. The system of utilizing local political officers to provide early warning to the Royal Air Force never evolved into a more robust system to provide the necessary intelligence the NLF. There was neither a permanent military presence nor an infusion of intelligence agents to gain better situational awareness.⁵⁵

Invoking its defense treaty with Britain in March, the Federation once again sought to assert its control of the Radfan region. A brigade-sized force of mainly British troops entered Radfan expecting a quick muscle-flexing operation to contain the tribal revolt, confirm the Federal Government's control of the territory, and stop attacks on the road. Instead, the Radfan insurgents capably defended their homeland. Superior firepower allowed the British and Federal troops to penetrate deep into the Radfan, though at considerable political and financial costs.⁵⁶ The campaign focused on killing and punishing the dissidents and lacked any hearts-and-minds component to cultivate long-term loyalty to the Federal Government.⁵⁷

Attempting to avoid the same results as Operation Nutcracker, the British established a long-term military presence in Radfan. A forward operating base was established around a runway near the geographic center of the Radfan territory. Additionally, the British manned several outposts on key hilltops near the road and constructed two forward airstrips. While this assisted in hindering the NLF operations, the British could not afford the troop density needed to deny the NLF movement along the mountains and wadis. Supplies continued to flow from Yemen through Radfan and to the growing insurgent population of the Aden colony.⁵⁸

In hopes of pacifying the region, the British and FRA forces began a campaign of selective devastation. Like the 1930s' proscription bombing, the government forces destroyed collective property to punish the Radfan tribes for the actions of the dissidents. The army and the RAF destroyed crops, livestock, and even villages to coerce recalcitrant

55. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 153.

56. Gavin, *Aden: Under British Rule*, 346.

57. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 154.

58. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 157.

tribes to submit to Federation rule. As with the earlier “air control” scheme, leaflets warned the population of impending strikes. But these efforts were uneven, and civilian casualties still occurred.⁵⁹

The proscription policy produced short-term operational gains, but it failed to create long-term strategic success. By the end of 1964, most Radfan tribes had sought reconciliation with the Federation. The Federal Regular Army supported by the RAF assumed responsibility for the area. This military success, however, proved a publicity failure. The media highlighted the British use of airpower and heavy weapons against what appeared to be a defenseless population. The resulting images fed the NLF propaganda campaigns that accused the British of harboring colonial intentions. The news reports led to condemnation from the United Nations, Egypt, the Soviet Union, and numerous human rights groups. Britons also began to question the tactics employed.⁶⁰

Negative publicity of the Radfan pacification campaign further aggravated tensions in the city of Aden. Despite remaining relatively calm throughout the operations of 1964, violence erupted in Aden when the NLF shifted the focus of its attacks to the urban area.⁶¹

Urban violence. Although there was hope that the 1964 Radfan campaign had defeated the rebel threat, the reality was different. As the NLF transitioned its operations from the desolate hinterland to the dense urban landscape of Aden, it initiated a campaign of assassination and terror. This brutal, bloody campaign targeted the British intelligence network in Aden and sought to diminish the population’s willingness to support the Federation and British. A typical attack consisted of kidnapping a intelligence officer or an informant, torturing him for information over several days, and then dumping his bullet-ridden body in a public place with a note pinned to it announcing, “executed by the NLF.” Eighteen intelligence officers and an unknown number of civilian informants died in this manner during 1965.⁶²

As the year progressed, the insurgents extended their assassination targets to public officials, off-duty military personnel, and oil executives. To amplify the terror, the

59. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 53-54.

60. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 54-55.

61. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 56.

62. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 141.

NLF conducted these attacks in public places with many witnesses. Arrests prompted threats and attacks against witnesses, jury members, police officers, and their close family members. Increasingly, the weakened Aden police force tolerated dissident-inspired extortion, bank raids, and other criminal activity.⁶³

This coordinated terror campaign severely hampered the implementation of traditional British counterinsurgency methods. Mistrust and fear limited the integration of economic, intelligence, military, and police elements.⁶⁴ Additionally, the Federation and British officials failed to appoint a Director of Operations who could combine military and civil command in one office. Various units had responsibility for their particular portion of Aden's security. No national hearts-and-minds campaign worked to woo the population from the insurgents. Aden's people remained at best neutral toward the Federation, which further compounded the difficulty of gaining timely intelligence. To remedy this problem, security forces often resorted to detention without trial and intense interrogation of any suspected terrorist or supporter. In response, the population moved closer to the insurgents, and useful intelligence subsequently became practically non-existent.⁶⁵

Allegations of mistreatment, rough handling, and torture of suspects gained the attention of the United Nations, Amnesty International, and the media. While the British government's internal investigations found little evidence of cruelty, this finding did little to placate the increasing condemnation from those organizations. The insurgents quickly learned the value of granting interviews after their release from captivity to claim that they endured mistreatment. This media manipulation strengthened the insurgent's propaganda efforts.⁶⁶

The NLF continued to be the dominant insurgent group, enjoying wide-ranging support from the hinterland's tribes, the port workers, refinery employees, and even elites residing in Aden. However, in Aden proper, the Arab Trade Union Congress (AUTC) and its political off shoot, the People's Socialist Party (PSP), formed a smaller and more localized movement that had remained nearly impotent since its founding in 1963. As

63. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 158-159 and Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 141-156.

64. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 159.

65. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 58-60.

66. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 186-187 & 201-205.

the NLF began to shift its focus toward Aden, the ATUC joined with several other smaller nationalist groups in May 1965 and formed a new, more influential, movement called the Organization for the Liberation of the Occupied South (OLOS). While the NLF continued its violent tactics, the OLOS worked to create fiction using labor strikes and mass demonstrations. The two organizations focused on the expulsion of the British, but little operational coordination and synchronization existed between them. In fact, an undercurrent of resentment existed as one group received credit for the efforts of the other.⁶⁷

In early 1966, Egyptian intelligence officers began orchestrating the unification of virtually all of the insurgent groups into one organization, the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). The Yemen Arab Republic, Egypt, and the Arab League welcomed the merger, and the United Nations Committee on Colonialism officially recognized FLOSY as the principal nationalist body in Aden. The union between the NLF and FLOSY, however, proved tenuous. Rivalry and bitterness over who perceived credit strained the relationship. After ten months, the NLF publicly declared its independence in November 1966. This split brought about an increase in violence, as both organizations waged a war against the British, the Federation, and each other for popular support.⁶⁸ The FLOSY continued to enjoy the backing of the Egyptians, but the NLF distanced itself from Egyptian control in pursuit of an independent Aden. Further confusing the depleted British intelligence agencies, Radio Cairo credited FLOSY with every insurgent incident to help boost its protégé group while ignoring efforts of the NLF.⁶⁹

Compared to the previous year, late 1965 and early 1966 contained twice the number of violent attacks with nearly double the military and civilian casualties. Despite sustained British support, the Federal government failed to establish a perception of legitimacy. A loosely unified insurgent group grew even more aggressive in its efforts to evict the British from Aden. The intense media coverage magnified the significance of each death and allowed the British people to scrutinize the counterinsurgency methods being employed. This ominous period coincided with the long-awaited conclusion of the

67. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 72, 78, & 148.

68. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 348-349 & Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 156.

69. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 195.

defense review that the Labor government had undertaken when it first came to power in 1964.⁷⁰

Decision to Disengage

Lord Beswick of the Foreign Office announced the results of this review on 16 February 1966 to Federal leaders. South Arabian independence would coincide with a complete withdrawal of British troops and the termination of advisory and security treaties.⁷¹ This decision derived from several contributing factors.

The Labor budget could not support simultaneous counterinsurgencies in Borneo and South Arabia. And because the British leaders perceived themselves to be winning in Borneo, they viewed Aden as being expendable.⁷² Combined with large cuts in their acquisition program, these leaders hoped that a withdrawal from Aden would provide a £400 million reduction in annual defense spending. Advocates for remaining in Aden proposed the alternatives of reducing the British commitments to NATO or the Far East. With de Gaulle's France publicly considering disengagement from NATO, this option gained no support. Concern over a growing confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia necessitated a major Far East presence to ensure market access. The deteriorating security situation and popular opposition left Aden's annual £35 million expenditure the most attractive target to achieve the budgetary reductions.⁷³ To the Labor government, military strength was less significant than the maintenance of economic health.⁷⁴

Despite the obvious cost savings of withdrawal, some argued the military base at Aden still held strategic value. Great Britain still had interests in the Middle East and Africa, and Aden's role as a staging base made geographic sense. The strategic reserve forces, however, were increasingly committed to internal security responsibilities in Aden and its hinterland. These commitments cast doubt on the force's ability to conduct operations similar to those in Kuwait in 1961 and East Africa in 1964. Aden's role as an intermediate staging base for the Far East also declined when Sudan forbade overfly rights

70. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 62-63.

71. Quoted in Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 165.

72. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 62.

73. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 159.

74. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, 63-64.

to British aircraft in 1964. The previous year over 1,500 troops bound for the Far East passed through Aden; but after the ban, only 120 personnel staged temporarily in Aden. Additionally, improvements in long-range transport aircraft and ship propulsion further detracted from the staging post argument.⁷⁵

Aden's strategic value also suffered from the establishment of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) on 8 November 1965. About 1,000 miles off the southern coast of India, the BIOT incorporated several island chains, including Diego Garcia, under British control. The BIOT announcement indicated that new territory would be available for the construction of military bases by both British and American governments. This new staging post would allow aircraft to reach the Far East without relying on Asian mainland bases. This acquisition provided a viable alternative to the Aden base.⁷⁶

In conversations between military and political leaders, the British government began to realize the limits of military power in confronting nationalism. Lessons from their recent experience demonstrated that “the ability of small bodies of British troops to maintain stability over vast areas East of Suez had been demonstrated in India before the war. On the other hand, India had also shown, after the war, that it is impossible for large bodies of troops to maintain order once the local population wants independence; even non-violent protest could defeat a whole army.”⁷⁷ The nationalism in Aden appeared to be more unified and powerful than the movement in India. Senior British commanders perceived the lessons from the Malayan Emergency as not being relevant because of the significantly different circumstances: the incompetence of Malayan Communist Part compared to the NLF backed by Nasser's Egypt; Malaya's geographic isolation; and the Aden insurgency's large-scale use of terrorist attacks.⁷⁸

Domestic politics, however, proved just as influential in the British decision to withdraw. Brigadier G.S. Heathcote, chief of staff to the Commander in Chief, Middle East, summarized the prevailing attitude: “The atmosphere in England (or indeed in HQ Middle East Command) in days of so-called peace would not then, and never will again I

75. Pieragostin, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 158 & 161-162.

76. Pieragostin, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 161-163.

77. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 62-63.

78. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 173.

believe, accept any great number of casualties, in fighting someone else's battle.”⁷⁹ Media reports and anti-war political officials depicted Aden’s Federal government as unwilling to assume a significant amount of the security responsibility. British political willpower also suffered from the growing costs to maintain the Aden base by supporting the inept Federal government. Maintaining the military base had begun to threaten regional political stability and Middle Eastern oil access. By relinquishing the base, the British removed a significant diplomatic obstacle to these higher priorities.⁸⁰

This British decision to grant Aden independence triggered a distinct change to the British strategy for and operations in South Arabia. From this point forward, the principal object was to withdraw British troops in good order and to prepare a viable successor government.⁸¹ The British had pinned their hopes on the established Federal Government to emerge as the viable successor. The Federal Supreme Council was “deeply and bitterly resentful,” according to Lord Beswick.⁸² While the closure of the base did not upset the Federal Supreme Council, the British refusal to assist in Aden’s defense after independence did. With insufficient resources to defeat the insurgency and Yemen’s forays across Aden’s borders, both the Federal government and British officials in Aden recognized the likelihood of a complete governmental collapse.⁸³

With their declaration of intention to abandon the military commitment, the British forfeited the initiative to the insurgents. The sudden reversal of policy was a devastating blow to the few British friends remaining in South Arabia.⁸⁴ The announcement provided both Egypt and Yemen encouragement to wait until the British withdrew, after which they could claim victory. Although the international situation loomed ominously over the Federation, the internal challenges proved far more damaging to the Federation’s future and the British prestige.⁸⁵

79. Quoted in Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 63.

80. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 62.

81. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 348.

82. Hinchcliffe, et al, *Without Glory in Arabia*, 208.

83. Hinchcliffe, et al, *Without Glory in Arabia*, 208-210.

84. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, 348.

85. Hinchcliffe, et al, *Without Glory in Arabia*, 211-212.

Violence escalated as Adenis considered a future without the British. “Terror incidents, which had risen from 36 in 1964 to 286 in 1965, jumped to 480 in 1966.”⁸⁶ The British attempts to maintain order suffered from a lack of incentive for the population to cooperate with the British efforts. The virtually abandoned Federal government had to compete with FLOSY and the NLF for popular support. The Federal government’s security forces reeled from increased defections, a growth of insurgent sympathizers, and a significant decrease in morale as defeat seemed ever-more certain. As the NLF and FLOSY struggled with each other for control of an area, the insurgents continued their violent campaign against the British and Federal counterinsurgents. Compounding the confusing situation, the British army increasingly doubted the allegiance of Federation forces and closely monitored them during engagements.⁸⁷ Increasingly, Great Britain’s officials in South Arabia questioned the logic of risking British lives trying to separate insurgents who were as intent on killing each other as they were on killing British soldiers.⁸⁸

Throughout 1967, the violence continued as the British withdrawal approached. All anti-British and anti-Federation elements, including officials in Yemen and Egypt, sought to demonstrate that the British withdrawal was not voluntary, but a retreat from a military failure. As the British troops implemented a phased withdrawal, the NLF immediately claimed control of the surrendered territory.⁸⁹ This trend continued as the British made final preparations for their full disengagement from South Arabia.

By September 1967, the NLF controlled virtually all of South Arabia. The only functional parts the Federal government were the army and a low-level civil service with no superior authority. FLOSY continued its violent struggle with the NLF, but it held the support of only a small enclave in Aden. Grasping the British desire to leave a stable government in Aden, the NLF sought negotiations to be recognized as the controlling group and the rightful inheritor of governmental authority. While attempting to avoid the appearance of placing the NLF in power, the British privately agreed to the request and

86. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 64.

87. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 65-66.

88. Walker, “Red Wolves and British Lions,” 164.

89. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 65-66.

promised to continue the existing financial aid for civil and military purposes for six months after British withdrawal.⁹⁰

On 29 November 1967, the last British soldier departed Aden. The orderly British military withdrawal contrasted greatly with the political disaster left behind. The People's Republic of Southern Yemen emerged from the British colony of Aden, and the former insurgents of the NLF began to exercise their political responsibility.⁹¹ This victory, however, did not bring long-term peace and stability to South Arabia.

Long-term Outcomes after Withdrawal

After 128 years of British rule, Aden and its surrounding area became an independent state; but it was not free from external involvement. Within six months of the British departure, a Marxist regime replaced the NLF's government. The Arab world's first Marxist state called itself the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The PDRY granted the USSR access to an important naval base, as a new imperial master replaced the British. While the loss of South Arabia benefited the Soviet's Cold War campaign, the subsequent dominoes never fell. The Middle Eastern countries benefited from the Cold War favors each side offered in return for pledges of support and loyalty. While remaining a proponent of Arab nationalism, even Egypt proved willing to accept American aid. After the Soviet Union's collapse and thirty years after the insurgency began, the two Yemens finally merged into one country, the Republic of Yemen. The Protectorate region remained nearly ungovernable and became a safe haven for many Middle Eastern terrorist groups that continue to plague contemporary international security, including the plotters of the USS Cole attack.⁹²

Insights

In the aftermath of the Aden experience, the British army published a revised version of *Keeping the Peace* in 1963 and a new manual, *Land Operations: Counter-Revolutionary Operations*, in late 1969. The successes of Malaya were prominently mentioned, but the lessons from combating the South Arabian insurgency were

90. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia*, 208-211.

91. Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*, 211.

92. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 66 and Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 165-166.

conspicuously absent from these documents.⁹³ As the American later did after Vietnam, the British displayed a collective amnesia about their counterinsurgency failure. The Aden insurgency, however, offers many insights that could prove useful in future situations.

Lack of Infrastructure Development. The British failed to provide the critical tools to foster the Federal Government's credibility as the inheritor of governmental power and responsibility. In 128 years, the British never significantly improved the Protectorate's infrastructure. This lack of investment inhibited development of kinship between the tribes and the Federal government. The tribes remained isolated from each other and unconnected to the growing city of Aden. While the city of Aden prospered from the merchants frequenting the port, officials failed to distribute the benefits beyond the city's walls. The hinterland never developed beyond a harsh terrain inhabited by bandits and an obstacle for land caravans to traverse. The British never sought to bind the tribes to Aden or to the national-level government through trade, routine interaction, or adequate representation. With a general lack of outside influence, the tribes continued to follow their traditional rules, customs, and justice system.⁹⁴ As the insurgency formed and gained momentum, the British could not overcome the years of neglect. The insurgency's promises proved an attractive alternative to the tribes.

Unlike the Romans, whose first instinct was always to build roads, improving thoroughfares in and through Aden's hinterland were never a British priority. The NLF's small groups of fighters, recruited from the indigenous populations of the Protectorate, enjoyed nearly unrestricted movement through the desert and across the mountain passes. The British and Federal forces suffered from a lack of high-speed avenues of entry into the Protectorate, an inability to move rapidly between hamlets, and a constant struggle against the environment to resupply units outside of Aden. The Radfan campaign, especially Operation Nutcracker, barely pierced the insurgents' safe haven despite its high toll in casualties, time, and resources. These ventures into the Protectorate normally lacked permanence and seldom developed long-term relationships with the inhabitants. The British withdrawal assured the Protectorate would remain beyond the reach of the

93. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 158-159.

94. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 155.

Federal government. Even under stable conditions, tax revenues would not support extensive civil infrastructure development without significant British financial assistance.

Premature Announcement of a Withdrawal Date. Realizing its untenable position in Aden, the British decision to announce a withdrawal date months before implementation proved a mistake. Although the British announcement helped ease domestic and international political pressure, it had numerous adverse consequences. In South Arabia, the British expected the announcement to curb the violence because the Arab nationalists had achieved their independence goal. But instead of a reduction, the announcement fueled more attacks on the Federal government and fighting between the insurgent groups. The Federation's inheritance of governmental legitimacy remained contested. The insurgents wanted to establish their dominance before the British completed their withdrawal.

Aden's insurgencies had gained momentum before the British conceded independence and renounced their future basing rights. Before the announcement, the NLF and FLOSY had entrenched themselves in the population and were winning the battle for legitimacy. The guerrillas had proven capable of winning engagements with the FRA. An orderly British departure would not propagate the evictor image coveted by the NLF. The insurgents retained the initiative for the rest of the conflict, and the British idly observed the chaos. With little likelihood of reversing the withdrawal decision, British commanders focused on self-preservation while the insurgents executed their violent campaign. The NLF and FLOSY both sought to guarantee their succession at the expense of the other and the Federal government.

The biggest negative of the announcement was the degradation of the Federal government's legitimacy. The population wanted to back the likely conflict's winner, not the colonial legacy. The Federal government never enjoyed widespread popular support. Great Britain's departure effectively abandoned those Adenis allied with the colonial administration. Withdrawal of British economic and military support doomed the Federal government. Realizing the Federal government heavily relied on Britain, Adenis

increasing flocked towards one of the insurgency groups. The insurgents offered a more attractive and organized alternative.⁹⁵

Lack of Intelligence. Failure to establish a viable human intelligence network virtually ceded the territory and popular support to the NLF's growing insurgency. While British and Federal troops remained aloof, Radio Cairo shaped the citizens' beliefs and attitudes in the inaccessible towns and hamlets of the Protectorate. The NLF freely moved among the people, but the British preferred to fly over them with little interaction beyond proscription bombing. Despite its representative façade, the Federation never connected with the population it supposedly ruled. As the British withdrew, the Federation lacked the informant network and local presence to challenge the insurgency. Instead, the security forces offered attractive targets for the insurgents groups to demonstrate their supremacy. The Federal government surrendered the initiative in the struggle. Without a reliable flow of information, the Federation could not separate the insurgents from the population. This lack of intelligence left the Federal government incapable of effectively meeting the population's security needs. The insurgent groups filled the void.

Unbalanced Approach. The British approached the turmoil primarily as a military problem. Their efforts omitted the necessary measures to garner long-term popular support for the Federal government. Facing the insurgent's nationalist cause, the Federal government failed to survive the British withdrawal. The Federation lacked an enduring connection to the entire population. The British gained initial stability through the Federation, but the agreement allowed the current rulers to maintain the status quo. The population never had a voice in the Federation's governmental process. FLOSY and the NLF offered an attractive alternative. The British never initiated a set of focused civil projects to balance the army's heavy-handed approach. The Federal government became synonymous with the oppressive measures. The population had little reason to support the Federation's long-term legitimacy.

Inadequate Information Operations. The NLF and associated groups preempted the government's feeble information efforts. Radio played a significant role in the insurgents' success, but television brought this conflict British living rooms.

95. Walker, "Red Wolves and British Lions," 165 and Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 286.

Foreign journalists broadcast images globally, and the war received international attention. Without offering the surrounding context, reporters highlighted airpower's employment against the defenseless Protectorate tribes; the civilian casualties of a terrorist attack or firefight; and the suspected detainee abuses during British interrogations. The British security forces handling the press coverage acted blissfully naïve. British authorities never attempted to broadcast their strategic message or to counter negative perceptions. The publicity favored the insurgents' propaganda campaign and eroded any support to sustain British presence in South Arabia. The extensive coverage shaped the opinions of British political leaders and the international community. After the withdrawal decision, the press coverage of the continuing violence ensured the British would not reverse their decision. The Federation's deteriorating situation could not overcome the political pressure to withdraw.⁹⁶

Checkered Employment of Airpower. Budgetary shortages forced the British defense establishment to develop an air-based strategy for Aden's security and stability. Airpower provided Britain a flexible and rapid response to emerging problems. Militarily, airpower proved very successful against the Yemen border crossings and suppressing the Protectorate's militant tribes. In support of ground forces, the RAF contributed to the success of the Radfan campaign. The benefits from airlift, especially via helicopter, proved invaluable. Tactically, airlift offset the lack of ground-based rapid movement throughout the Protectorate and helped rapidly resupply units operating outside of Aden. While the harsh climate challenged maintainers to keep the aircraft operational, pilots quickly adjusted to South Arabia's varying environmental factors. Finally, airlift significantly contributed to the British military's orderly withdrawal; in fact, the last British soldier departed Aden via helicopter.⁹⁷

The air-based strategy, however, failed to consider higher order effects. Airpower, without a complementary ground force, helped isolate the Protectorate's population. With little direct interaction, security forces could not build a contact network or establish mutual trust with the population. As the insurgency developed, this strategy failed to establish the necessary human-to-human contact required to predict or

96. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*, 67-68.

97. James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 208.

anticipate insurgent activity. Dependence on airpower contributed to the failure to develop roads throughout the hinterland. The British built or improved several airstrips in the underdeveloped areas; but with no civilian aviation program, the tribes benefitted little from this infrastructure. Additionally, the British conducted few humanitarian resupply operations. Tribal leaders learned to manipulate the proscriptive bombing to exact revenge on rivals. As the insurgency migrated into the urban terrain, the perceived value of airpower dropped. Given the existing technological limitations, leaders determined urban air strikes possessed too many potentially negative effects. Lacking good air-to-ground communications, reconnaissance missions did not deliver timely information. Additionally, pilots struggled to distinguish between the insurgents and the general population. Providing lessons to future insurgents, FLOSY and the NLF negated the advantage of British airpower by intermingling with the population and engaging in close-order combat with security forces.

Insights for Withdrawal. Great Britain never established the conditions necessary for the Federation's enduring success. They failed to develop a long-term strategy that included Aden's independence. With shortsightedness, the British never initiated road construction, hearts-and-minds campaigns, information operations, or informant network development. These efforts would have assisted creating a legitimate heir to British authority. Instead, the Federation remained isolated from the population, and the British gained temporary stability. The premature withdrawal announcement came before the Federation established any legitimacy and provided early warning to the insurgents. When the withdrawal date became set, neither British domestic nor international pressure would sanction a reversal or the inclusion of additional aid. The British withdrawal effectively abandoned the frail government to compete against healthy, well-entrenched insurgencies. The NLF filled the void created by the withdrawal and won the population's support. The lack of a comprehensive development strategy doomed the Federation before the last British soldier departed South Arabia. In sum, Aden represents a tragic use of the counterinsurgent doing almost everything wrong, while the insurgent did almost everything right.

CHAPTER 2

The American Withdrawal from Vietnam in 1972-1973

Even before Ho Chi Minh's insurgents defeated the French, the United States became militarily involved in Indochina. On 1 August 1950, it created the four-man Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). The MAAG ballooned to 342 advisors prior to the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954.¹ By mid 1968, America deployed 549,500 military personnel to Vietnam and actively fought beside the South Vietnamese. In 1973, America ceased its military involvement. Nearly abandoned, the South Vietnamese regime succumbed to a North Vietnamese invasion two years later.² An army officer assigned to the US Embassy, COL Harry Summers, described the 1975 American Saigon evacuation as “a shameful day to be an American.”³ That shameful day highlights the frustration many Americans feel when analyzing the failures in Vietnam.

After examining the strategic context influencing America's Vietnam War, this chapter utilizes Galula's framework to assess the conflict's development and spread. Next, the chapter recounts the American objectives for continued involvement and outlines the changes resulting from the increased troop commitment. Subsequently, this chapter examines the political decision to withdraw from Vietnam. Then the chapter identifies long-term outcomes after the withdrawal of American troops. Finally, it offers some insights from America's Vietnam War.

Strategic Context of the Vietnamese Insurgency

Historical Influences. The insurgency that challenged France and the United States first emerged during World War II. Starting in 1941, Ho Chi Minh and his Communist insurgents fought to expel the Japanese invaders from Vichy French Indochina. Funneling supplies through China, America aided their resistance efforts.

1. John Nagl, “Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: American Organizational Culture and Learning,” in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, Ed. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 132.

2. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1988), 497-498& 524.

3. Quoted in James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 276.

While only marginally successful against the Japanese, the Viet Minh confidently challenged French attempts to reestablish their pre-war control of Indochina. Ho Chi Minh portrayed the French as the latest occupier to deny the Vietnamese the right to self-governance.⁴

The United States saw Vietnamese national independence aspirations as being aligned with American national values and anti-colonialism policies. Mao Zedong's success in mainland China in 1949, the Communist invasion of Korea in 1950, and a publicized Communist commitment to support wars of national liberation complicated the American perception of France's struggle in Indochina. During the cold war, communism, not colonialism, posed the largest threat to American interests. In January 1950, Moscow and Beijing officially recognized Ho Chi Minh's movement and removed any lingering doubt about the insurgency's communist intentions. After its initially neutral stance, the United States supported the French military efforts to defeat the Viet Minh and encouraged Vietnamese independence under French tutelage. Neither goal was achieved.⁵

Frustrated by the Korean War and concerned about American commitments to NATO commitments, President Dwight Eisenhower declined the French May 1954 request for US intervention. Shortly after surrendering at Dien Bien Phu, the French lost the will to continue the Indochina struggle and negotiated a peace treaty with the Viet Minh.⁶

The Geneva Accords of 21 July 1954 created the separate states of Laos and Cambodia, while artificially dividing Vietnam at the 17th Parallel. The Viet Minh established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the north. Through a diverse collection of non-Communist factions, Ngo Dinh Diem formed the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in the south. The Geneva Accords provided for general elections to create a representative government for a unified Vietnam. The elections never took place, and the

4. Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 17.

5. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 5-6 and Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 17-18.

6. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 19.

two halves began to grow further apart. Almost immediately, the United States announced its support for the RVN and further expanded the MAAG.⁷

Portraying himself as a benevolent dictator, Diem constructed a fledgling central government for South Vietnam. Two threats plagued the fledgling government: internal instability and external invasion. Diem's government and the American advisors struggled to achieve balance in their security strategy.⁸ After much debate, the following assumption emerged, "the ability to promote internal security was automatically provided for in the creation of forces capable to promote external security."⁹ Misguided by the conventional experiences in Greece and Korea, the MAAG created the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in its own image. American military doctrine lacked any articulation of counterinsurgency fundamentals.¹⁰

In choosing to prioritize a Korean-style conflict over the Viet Minh's guerrilla threat, Diem's government remained vulnerable to exploitation of the growing social and economic problems. Americans judged Diem's early political success satisfactorily and remained complacent about South Vietnam's internal security. Contrary to the American perception, Ngo Dinh Diem feared the Viet Minh threat. He attempted several civil actions to counter Vietnam's most pressing problems: political and social development; land reform; and agricultural improvements. Grounded on these broad concepts, Diem's plan mirrored successful counterinsurgency fundamentals. Poor implementation, however, undermined the effort. The programs suffered from poor leadership, half-hearted buy-in by subordinate officials, and widespread corruption. Diem's urban focus granted the Viet Minh unfettered operations in their strongest support base, the rural communities. Most of Diem's land reforms did not affect 90 percent of South Vietnam's farmers. Finally, Diem's internal security forces proved incapable in opposing the growing insurgency. Often they aided the communist cause with their brutality.¹¹

7. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 7.

8. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 7.

9. *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, The Senator Gravel Edition, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 433.

10. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 432-433 and John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 120-122.

11. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 305-314.

By 1960, the South Vietnamese communists completed their political organization and began openly challenging the Saigon government.¹² Due to American neglect, the internal security forces now required ARVN assistance to counter the growing insurgent threat. But even the ARVN appeared incapable of defeating this festering threat to Diem's government.

Global Influences on the Vietnamese Insurgency. The Republic of Vietnam's struggles against communism, internal and external, grew more significant when viewed through the lens of the Cold War. A 1952 National Security Council Staff Study clearly articulated the American fear of communism spreading like dominoes falling:

Communist domination of Southeast Asia, whether by means of overt invasion, subversion, or accommodation on the part of the indigenous governments, would be critical to United States security interests. Communist success in this area would spread doubt and fear among other threatened non-communist countries as to the ability of the United States and the United Nations to halt communist aggression elsewhere. It would strengthen the claim that the advance of communism is inexorable and encourage countries vulnerable to Soviet pressure to adopt policies of neutralism or accommodation. Successful overt Chinese Communist aggression in this area, especially if achieved without encountering more than token resistance on the part of the United States of the United Nations, would have critical psychological and political consequences which would probably include the relatively swift alignment of the rest of Asia and thereafter of the Middle East to communism, thereby endangering the stability and security of Europe.¹³

The Eisenhower administration, however, remained focused on resolving the Korean War first, while relying on the French to secure Indochina. After the French retreat, American policy relied on the Diem government and the MAAG to contain communism.

The uneasy stalemate of the 1952 Geneva Accords created a situation that none of the global participants desired to change. The United States lacked public support for military intervention less than a year after the end of the Korean War. France continued its withdrawal from the region. The Soviet Union had only peripheral interests in Southeast Asia and faced internal instability after Stalin's death. China, also affected by

12. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 7.

13. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 375.

the Korean War, did not desire another war with the United States, especially since the American nuclear doctrine of Massive Retaliation acquired new public emphasis.¹⁴

While they brought about a tenuous peace, the Geneva Accords failed to alter international interests in Vietnam. The United States remained determined to prevent the spread of Communism. Both China and the Soviet Union feared American intervention in an area they considered to be within their traditional spheres of influence. The Soviet Union maintained its commitment to the international class struggle and pledge to support communist rebellions. China, the most radical of the communist countries, viewed Vietnam as a national interest, not just an ideological struggle. A pro-Western country adjacent to its southern border threatened China's goal to have a friendly buffer surrounding its vast border. The slow encroachment by pro-Western countries, first South Korea and then South Vietnam, proved menacing to the Chinese.¹⁵

From 1954 to late 1960, the North Vietnamese Politburo reconstituted the guerrilla groups in South Vietnam and orchestrated a campaign of isolated assassinations that gradually escalated to an armed insurgency. Diem's government described these rebels as Viet Cong and the term came into general use by his officials and Americans. By 1960, the National Liberation Front (NLF) emerged as the nationalist face for South Vietnamese rebelling against the American-dominated Diem government.¹⁶ American officials easily traced the Viet Cong's sponsorship back to the government of North Vietnam. Hanoi's government appeared to be a surrogate for the Sino-Soviet communist brotherhood. American analysts found proof in Nikita Khrushchev's speech in December 1960 that promised Soviet support to wars of national liberation.¹⁷

The new Kennedy Administration, which took office in January 1961, sought to establish South Vietnam as the hard line against communism. Defeating Khrushchev's wars of national liberation became a top priority for President Kennedy and his advisors.¹⁸ Secretary of Defense McNamara claimed, "The fall of South Vietnam to Communism would lead to the fairly rapid extension of Communist control, or complete

14. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 635.

15. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 634-635.

16. Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lesson Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 102.

17. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 643-644.

18. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 103.

accommodation to Communism, in the rest of mainland Southeast Asia and in Indonesia. The strategic implications worldwide, particularly in the Orient, would be extremely serious.”¹⁹ In his first State of the Union Address in January 1961, President Kennedy began the public relations campaign to generate public support for military action against the communist threat. Kennedy argued that Khrushchev’s speech demonstrated existence of a coordinated Chinese and Soviet conspiracy for world domination.²⁰

By June 1961, the Soviet Union and America appeared destined for indirect conflict. The Kennedy Administration had had its confidence shaken by the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961. Khrushchev felt pressure from within the Kremlin and criticism from Beijing over his decision to lift a blockade of Berlin. While both sides desired to avoid direct confrontation and possible escalation to nuclear war, neither side felt it could show weakness. After being browbeaten by Khrushchev at the June 1961 Vienna summit, President Kennedy remarked, “Now we have a problem in trying to make our power credible, and Vietnam looks like the place.”²¹

Regional Influences. Laos and Cambodia heavily influenced Vietnam’s fate. Mirroring the French experience, the American struggle against communism spread across all the Indochinese countries. The Laotian and Cambodian borders with Vietnam developed into a lawless region. Laos struggled against its own communist insurgency, and Cambodia’s weak central government suffered from increasing unrest. Neither government devoted resources to policing the area. Exploiting the political vacuum, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong created safe havens and infiltration routes, most notably the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to support their operations. Initially, the United States refused to cross the border into Cambodia or Laos and attempted to respect these countries’ sovereignty. Realizing their restraint’s futility, the American military escalated from clandestine operations to large-scale conventional bombing. Ignoring military pleas, American senior leaders retained approval authority for cross-border operations and refused to remove the restrictions. Despite several military campaigns,

19. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 108.

20. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 644.

21. Quoted in Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 645.

the South Vietnamese border with Laos and Cambodia remained a significant hindrance to conventional and counterinsurgency operations.²²

Further west, Thailand distrusted the communists and supported the United States. Fearing further spread of communism, the Thais waged a campaign against insurgents along their border with Laos. Inside Thailand, Americans established airbases to support their operations in the region.²³ Starting in 1967, Thailand augmented American forces inside Vietnam. While their numerical presence never rivaled that of the United States, the Thais eventually provided 11,000 men, including the son of the premier. During engagements with the Viet Cong, Thai troops proved competent and tenacious.²⁴ Despite the growing international scorn, Thailand remained a committed American ally. The last Thai soldier departed Vietnam with the Americans in 1972.²⁵

American Domestic Influences. As the Viet Cong gained strength, the American presidency passed from Dwight D. Eisenhower to John F. Kennedy. In 1959, no American official voiced concern about Vietnam; it simply was not sufficiently serious to compete with the other crises. Both administrations viewed Vietnam as a peripheral issue until late 1961. Generally, global events more heavily influenced decisions about Vietnam than the deteriorating internal situation.²⁶ Global events amplified the normal turbulence associated with presidential power transfer. The *Pentagon Papers* described the Kennedy's first months as nearly chaotic. "From Laos to Cuba to Vienna to Berlin to the Soviet nuclear testing site at Semipalatinsk to New York's East River, crisis after crisis has fallen across the White House with a rapidity and gravity that has absorbed Mr. Kennedy's energy since his inauguration...."²⁷ Kennedy's busy times occurred simultaneously with a major transition in American national security policy.

To preserve American economic strength, Eisenhower advocated the subordination of conventional military forces to domestic economic priorities. The experience of the Korean War signaled to Eisenhower that the American public would

22. Andrew A. Wiest, *The Vietnam War, 1956-1975* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 20-30.

23. Wiest, *The Vietnam War*, 23.

24. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 259.

25. Wiest, *The Vietnam War*, 37.

26. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 17-23.

27. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 72-73.

not support a protracted, limited conflict in a distant land. To mitigate this constraint, Eisenhower's New Look strategy advocated massive nuclear retaliation over conventional attempts to match the Soviet Union's military might.²⁸ In contrast, Kennedy's *Flexible Response* intended to provide policy makers multiple choices to cope with threats to American interests. The new strategy of Flexible Response intended to provide a full spectrum of military responses towards aggression. Unlike Eisenhower, Kennedy did not feel compelled to curtail defense spending to maintain a balanced budget. The Kennedy Administration intended Flexible Response to signal that communist aggression against the free world would produce a suitable, selective, swift, and effective America response.²⁹

Galula's Model Applied to Vietnamese Insurgency

Galula's prerequisites help to explain the success enjoyed by the Viet Cong. While the dividing line between Viet Cong and North Vietnam proved blurry, the insurgency still faced the challenge of overcoming the South Vietnamese material superiority. Nevertheless, the Viet Cong found South Vietnam's conditions favored the Viet Cong.

A Cause. In 1960, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam began proclaiming the unifying cause uniting the Viet Cong's military efforts. With a nationalist façade, the Viet Cong sought to overthrow the American-dominated Diem government and to unify with the North.³⁰ Following Mao's Chinese example, there was little differentiation between the military and political apparati. The National Liberation Front remained under the control of the People's Revolutionary Party, which essentially served as the southern wing of the North Vietnamese Communist Party.³¹

The Viet Cong viewed their efforts as a just struggle of the people. In Vietnamese, *struggle* translates to *dau tranh* but contains a much more intense connotation than the English word. At a Viet Cong rally, an official contended, “*Dau tranh* is all important to a revolutionist. It marks his thinking, his attitudes, his behavior.

28. H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 10.

29. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 10-11.

30. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 102.

31. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 12.

His life, his revolutionary work, his whole world is *dau tranh*. The essence of his existence is *dau tranh*.³² Through their *dau tranh*, the Viet Cong supporters could expect a better life upon victory.

To increase their attractiveness, the National Liberation Front published a Manifesto with ten points:

1. Overthrow of disguised colonial regime and formation of national and democratic coalition administration.
2. Promote freedom of expression, press, belief, reunion, association, and movement.
3. Abolish American economic monopoly and promote Vietnamese agriculture and industry.
4. Conduct land reform and guarantee the peasant's rights.
5. Reform education and eliminate illiteracy.
6. Abolish foreign military involvement Vietnam and build a national army to defend the fatherland and the people.
7. Promote equality between the sexes, nationalities, and minorities.
8. Seek peace and neutrality with all surrounding countries to establish respect for independence and sovereignty of Vietnam.
9. Establish normal relations between the two Vietnams in preparation for peaceful reunification.
10. Oppose aggressive wars and actively defend world peace.

In later versions, these tenets were condensed to eight points, de-emphasizing reunification. Reduction broadened the potential recruiting base to include those South Vietnamese that were anti-Diem or anti-US but not necessarily pro-communist.³³

Counterinsurgent Vulnerability. Under French rule, Ngo Dinh Diem advocated Vietnamese independence but rejected Ho Chi Minh's communist vision. After six months in Viet Minh captivity for publicly doubting Ho Chi Minh, Diem fled Indochina. He spent two years in an American religious school before moving to Paris in 1953.³⁴

32. Quoted in *Pentagon Paper*, vol. 1, 337.

33. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 340-343; NLF Manifesto's 10 points were paraphrased and summarized.

34. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 35-36.

At the 1954 Geneva conference, Diem received an appointment as the Prime Minister from Emperor Bao Dai. But Vietnamese society was fractured. Its loyalty was unevenly divided between Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem; Emperor Bao Dai; the religious sects Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa; crime syndicates like Binh Xuyen; the Vietnamese Army; and displaced political parties from North Vietnam.³⁵ Amid this political chaos, the South Vietnamese government survived attempted coups d'états by the army and several smaller, and seemingly unrelated, groups.³⁶

Through a rigged election and with help from his brother, Diem ousted Bao Dai and seized control of the government in 1956. Many predicted his imminent downfall, but Diem installed what appeared to be a representative government; drafted a new constitution; attempted to extend governmental control into former Viet Minh havens; pledged land, public health, and education reforms; and established a national army augmented by rural security forces in the countryside. These reforms masked Diem's authoritarianism. His experience as Prime Minister taught Diem to execute swift, violent actions against dissenters and to demand absolute personal loyalty from top officials. The political apparatus Diem created to implement the reform programs became a rigidly organized, overly centralized familial oligarchy. This alienated many influential societal groups. Ultimately, this alienation caused his regime to rely on a narrow and disintegrating support base. Despite his undemocratic practices, Diem became America's ally in the anti-communist struggle.³⁷ In his autobiography, General William Westmoreland, who subsequently commanded American forces in Vietnam, concluded, "the political atmosphere that developed in South Vietnam during the early years of the republic's life was conducive to the growth of insurgency."³⁸

By 1960, it appeared that Diem had consolidated political control, but the façade soon collapsed. Diem's open favoritism toward the Roman Catholic community hampered creation of a national identity and magnified the existing tensions between the various ethnic and religious groups. This further alienated the villagers and denied the

35. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 5.

36. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 252.

37. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 252-253 and McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 35-36.

38. General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 56.

government rural popular support.³⁹ Diem's economic reforms targeted the developing an urban industrial base and largely neglected the peasants.⁴⁰ Contrary to the official records, Diem's anti-communism security directives terrified the Vietnamese peasants and reduced the regime's popularity. They failed, however, to thwart Viet Cong subversive efforts.⁴¹

Starting in 1960, Diem's loss of popular confidence increased its pace. With little local protection, the South Vietnamese peasants resented Diem's punishment for complying with the Viet Cong's coercion. Diem's resettlement program forced many Vietnamese to leave their traditional lands under the fallacy of improving their security. The Viet Cong simply joined the forced migration. The unpopularity of Diem's regime grew to a crescendo by 1963, and a violent change of government seemed inevitable.⁴²

A rift between Diem's government and the United States began to develop in 1963. Sir Robert Thompson, Chief of the British Advisory Mission, reported, "Now, in March 1963, I can say, and in this I am supported by all members of the mission, that the Government is beginning to win the shooting war against the Viet Cong."⁴³ With twelve thousand military advisors in South Vietnam, American officials felt optimistic about the Viet Cong's military defeat and the improvement of the ARVN. But even when dispersed throughout the countryside, the large American contingent caused Diem concern. He feared the appearance of being an American stooge. The Viet Cong propaganda used the large American military presence to argue that the Americans had simply replaced the French.⁴⁴ American officials wanted to expand their advisory role into other governmental arenas, but Diem adamantly refused.

Ngo Dinh Diem began to challenge the American decision to link further aid and assistance to Vietnamese compliance with US recommendations for policy and programs. This strategy allowed the United States to influence the measures adopted to defeat the Viet Cong. Diem began to feel that the United States had few replacement options.

39. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 10.

40. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 704.

41. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 254-255.

42. Brigadier Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), 8-9.

43. Quoted in *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 225.

44. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 140.

American officials praised him as the only Vietnamese leader capable of rallying his country to defeat the Communist threat. The *Pentagon Papers* captured the American dilemma. “No amount of pressure or suasion was likely to be effective in getting Diem to adopt ideas or policies which he did not find to his liking, since we had communicated our unwillingness to consider the ultimate sanction – withdrawal of support for his regime. We had ensnared ourselves in a powerless, no alternatives policy.”⁴⁵

The United States finally broke ties with Diem’s government over the Buddhist crisis of May 1963. Nine people died and fourteen were injured when governmental troops fired into a Buddhist crowd protesting the renewed enforcement emphasis for a long-standing ban on the public display of religious flags. A few days earlier, the government had ignored the display of Papal flags during a celebration. While Diem intentionally delayed his response, the Buddhist employed the international press to depict their mass demonstrations and hunger strikes. This included the broadcasting of Buddhist monks committing suicide by fire. Diem later announced that Viet Cong attacks caused the deaths and issued a coldly delivered conciliatory message to the Buddhists. The disingenuous announcement was an effort to appease the American officials and media agents over a widening political fissure. The tension between the Buddhists and the government continued to fester as the two sides participated in half-hearted negotiations. On 21 August, Diem’s regime raided a number of pagodas arresting over 1,400 Buddhists hoping to eliminate their opposition. Diem assumed the United States might protest but would later acquiesce, as they had always done before.⁴⁶

But Kennedy was becoming disenchanted. In September 1963, he dispatched Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, to Vietnam to convey his frustration with Diem’s handling of the Buddhist situation. The officials pleaded for governmental reform. Rufus Phillips recalled, “Diem stuck by his guns, insisting the Americans were mistaken. He wouldn’t budge. I was not surprised; in a way, I admired him for his guts. Here were two of the highest possible emissaries of the Kennedy administration...telling him he had to change

45. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 229.

46. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 154-164 and *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 225-233.

his government.”⁴⁷ The final McNamara and Taylor report concluded that the military campaign continued to make progress but warned that the political tension and Diem’s growing unpopularity would erode the favorable military trends. Delivering their findings in early October, they also noted that they had observed no evidence of coup planning.⁴⁸

Ironically, several American officials had been subtly encouraging the South Vietnamese military leaders to oust Diem. By mid-October, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge informed General Duong Van Mihn that the United States would not thwart a coup. Additionally, the ambassador indicated that American supported any Vietnamese government promising to gain the support of its people and committed to win the war against communism.⁴⁹ Despite the secrecy, the coup planning was not a complete surprise to Diem. In a private meeting with Diem on October 30, Rufus Phillips recalled the beleaguered President asking him about the possibility of a coup. “I looked him in the eye, I couldn’t lie to him, ‘I am afraid so, Mr. President.’”⁵⁰

On 1 November 1963, several South Vietnamese generals overthrew Diem, in the process killing him and many family members that held governmental positions. By remaining passive at best and encouraging Diem’s overthrow at worst, America deepened its involvement in Vietnam’s affairs. This action also played into the hands of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese by demonstrating that South Vietnam’s government was illegitimate and incapable of serving the people. Given Diem’s feudal-style government, the government’s reconstruction required comprehensive efforts from the national level down to the hamlets. The struggle for South Vietnamese popular support now featured an immature government against a well-developed and resourced Viet Cong insurgency. Despite some public clamoring, American withdrawal seemed highly unlikely because many officials justified the coup as a means to better prosecute the war.⁵¹ Following this initial coup, the government of South Vietnam changed eight more times in just over a year.⁵²

47. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 197.

48. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 250.

49. *Pentagon Papers*, vol 2. 257.

50. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 201.

51. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 655-656.

52. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 9.

Favorable Geography. South Vietnam equals California's length but has only half the width. A thin arable strip of land extends along the entire coast. In the south, the Mekong River and the delta's flatlands provides South Vietnam's most fertile land. The jungle-covered Annamite Mountains extend southward across nearly two-thirds of the country. The famed Central Highlands form around two breaks in this mountain chain, the Kontum Plateau in the center and the Darlac Plateau further south. With almost 40%



of the land dominated by jungles with multiple canopies of growth, tall scrub brush, thick elephant grass, or murky swamps, the uninhabitable terrain provided an ideal insurgent safe haven.⁵³

53. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 50-51.

Figure 2 Vietnam

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *Vietnam*, 1985, “Perry-Castaneda Map Collection – UT Library Online,” http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/vietnam.jpg (accessed 22 May 2009).

The inhospitable terrain forced approximately 10.5 million of the 16 million Vietnamese people to live on only 40% of the land. Despite this seemingly close proximity, the society was highly fragmented. The roots of these divisions include history, geography, underdeveloped communications, and religious and ethnic differences. During the colonial years, the French sought to exploit these differences to maintain order. General Westmoreland opined that the strongest common bond for South Vietnam’s diverse population was “the common hatred of the master,” the Chinese, the Japanese, the French, or the Americans; this intense hatred unified “a minuscule minority of Communists under a charismatic leader with the *nom de guerre* of Ho Chi Minh.”⁵⁴

South Vietnam’s lack of roads and other lines of communication exacerbated the social divisions. Most major roads radiated from Saigon toward the north and south. Very few roads traversed the width of the country, and the principal railroad line paralleled the major north-south road. The peasant farmer’s primary transportation mode consisted of the 3,500 miles of navigable canals, streams, and rivers, predominately in the Mekong Delta. Only Saigon and Danang had port facilities capable of handling larger vessels. Before the Americans began their build-up, Tan Son Nhut, on the fringe of Saigon, was the only major airfield in the country. Like the British in Aden, the French made few efforts to bring modernity to Vietnam; the colony existed to fill Paris’s coffers.⁵⁵

This deficient transportation infrastructure explains why the village remained the only governmental level to which a Vietnamese peasant could relate. Several hamlets of 10,000 or more people comprised the village. South Vietnam had 2,500 villages and 16,000 hamlets. Grouped together these villages formed districts with a governing body located in district towns. Almost 250 districts joined and formed a province, much as American counties group into a state. South Vietnam had forty-four provinces. To the peasant, the central government represented foreigners, more accurately, Vietnamese

54. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 50.

55. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 51.

acting like foreigners. Enjoying the solitude of a simple life, the Vietnamese peasant remained nearly apolitical. His lifestyle and nature seldom produced conditions that required the intervention of a government above the village level.⁵⁶

The geography and lack of mature transportation infrastructure created numerous challenges for South Vietnam and the Americans. While the demilitarized zone (DMZ) with North Vietnam proved easily defendable, the available security forces could not secure the vast border with South Vietnam's neutral neighbors, Laos and Cambodia. Avoiding the defenses of the DMZ and exploiting America's unwillingness to violate neutrality openly, the Ho Chi Minh Trail allowed insurgent supplies from North Vietnam protected passage into the Viet Cong's southern safe havens. The terrain and vegetation obscured the primary and alternate routes and concealed traveling supply convoys from airborne detection. The underdeveloped nature of the Ho Chi Minh Trail allowed easy bypass or repair of damage from the American semi-covert interdiction bombing later in the war. Men and material continued to traverse the Ho Chi Minh Trail throughout America's involvement.⁵⁷

While the enemy exploited the geography and lack of infrastructure, the counterinsurgents struggled to overcome these challenges. Technology, such as the helicopter, helped military forces travel rapidly through the region but did little to help South Vietnamese peasants transport their goods to with neighboring hamlets. While the helicopter helped the military to react to emergencies, the villagers never perceived any permanence in the security created by the military's sudden presence. Hit-and-run tactics reduced the number of insurgent fighters but never addressed the real concerns of the population. Hamlet security forces often became isolated because few roads allowed for rapid reinforcement movement between them. This allowed the Viet Cong to control many hamlets in the rural areas.

Outside Support. The North Vietnamese Central Military Committee led by Ho Chi Minh envisioned a largely self-sustaining South Vietnamese insurgency. The Viet Cong, however, never fulfilled this goal and required continuous North Vietnamese

56. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 51 & 53.

57. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 107; Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 69-72; and Bernard C. Nalty, *The War Against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos 1968-1972* (Washington DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2005), 4-7.

support. To meet the Viet Cong's requirement and those of North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), Ho received support from his fellow communists in the Soviet Union, China, and the Warsaw Pact countries. The North's domestic industrial base could not furnish the necessary large amounts of small arms and ammunition; heavier weapons like machine guns and mortars; medical supplies; and high-tech items like communication equipment. North Vietnamese industries resembled small family-run workshops and not mechanized factories. Eventually, North Vietnamese soldiers had to bolster the Viet Cong's fighting force, further blurring the distinction between the North and the insurgency.

North Vietnam assumed an active transportation role to resupply the southern insurgents. Caches near the DMZ did not await Viet Cong carrying parties. The Viet Cong did not possess the manpower to smuggle supplies and fight the war throughout the countryside. Hanoi created the 559th Transportation Group to improve the Ho Chi Minh Trail, transport the vital supplies southward, and manage its Laotian and Cambodian caches. Eventually the transportation means of the 559th improved from bicycles, porters, and pack animals to cargo trucks.

In addition to supplies, the North Vietnamese provided the Viet Cong advisory assistance and training. This especially applies to propaganda and political activities. As their influence operations expertise grew, the Viet Cong exploited Saigon's political unrest and gained popular influence without physical fighting. As the insurgency developed, ideas rivaled bullets in importance.

Considering North Vietnam's involvement, American analysts concluded the insurgents would strictly obey any orders from Hanoi. Increasingly, the distinction between Viet Cong and North Vietnam disappeared in the formulation of American strategy.⁵⁸

American Goals for Troop Commitment

In 1956, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter F. Robertson, articulated several American objectives for Vietnam. "To support a friendly non-Communist government in Viet-Nam and to help it diminish and eventually

58. Nalty, *The War Against Trucks*, 3-6; *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 4, 57; *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 693-696; and *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 3, 652-653, 656 & 668.

eradicate Communist subversion and influence. To help the Government of Viet-Nam establish forces necessary for internal security. To encourage support for Free Viet-Nam by the non-Communist world. To aid in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a country and people ravaged by 8 ruinous years of civil and international war.”⁵⁹

Under President Kennedy, the national goal changed very little. A National Security Council directive dated 11 May 1961 established the prevention of communist domination of South Vietnam as an American national objective. In addition to the military assistance, Kennedy sought to employ nation-building techniques to neutralize the communist threat. The overall strategy was to create a viable and increasingly democratic society through military, political, economic, psychological, and covert actions.⁶⁰

The Commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), General Westmoreland, stated that his mission was “to assist the Government of Vietnam and its armed forces to defeat externally directed and supported communist subversion and aggression and attain an independent South Vietnam functioning in a secure environment. Although the objective’s exact wording might change from time to time, it remained essentially the same throughout American involvement.”⁶¹ The military vantage point remained focused on defeating the communists.

After five years and a significant growth in troops, the American goal remained the same. According to General Creighton Abrams’ 1969 MACV plan, the ultimate United States objective for South Vietnam was “a free independent and viable nation which is not hostile to the United States, functioning in a secure environment both internally and regionally.”⁶² At a subsequent meeting, Abrams published a more succinct mission statement. “The mission is not to seek out and destroy the enemy. The mission is to provide protection for the people of Vietnam.”⁶³

The American goals for Vietnam remained constant. New presidents occupied the White House. The military commanders came and went. American forces

59. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1, 612.

60. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 649-650.

61. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 57.

62. Lewis Sorely, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 235.

63. Sorely, *Thunderbolt*, 237.

experienced success and frustrations in their operations. American focus, however, remained the defeat of the communist threat to South Vietnam. One Army historical account notes that “despite a great deal of rhetoric, American objectives in South Vietnam were relatively simple and remained so – the establishment and preservation of a non-Communist government in South Vietnam.”⁶⁴

Situation after American Troop Commitment

Despite its inflammatory rhetoric, Ho Chi Minh’s 1945 prediction about the Western interest in Vietnam proved accurate. “If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who will tire of it.”⁶⁵ Both Kennedy and Diem died in November 1963. Throughout 1964, the Viet Cong increased their operational tempo and aggravated the political chaos. Across South Vietnam, the Diem regime’s deposition spiraled into widespread governmental instability. Within the new junta, the victorious generals and opportunistic individuals vied for prominence. Benefiting from a surge in supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the Viet Cong increased their raids, ambushes, and recruiting operations in the Mekong Delta, the Central Highlands, and the urban centers of Saigon and Danang. By the autumn of 1964, General Vo Nguyen Giap’s North Vietnamese Army (NVA) committed two divisions to augment the Viet Cong and hasten victory.⁶⁶

President Lyndon Johnson entered the White House as the situation in South Vietnam rapidly deteriorated. The wholesale change of South Vietnamese government made it nearly impossible to mount a consistent political and military anti-communist campaign to secure the hamlets. In the rural areas, this left few counterinsurgent asylums to expand. Assessing the Viet Cong’s increasing influence, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge concluded the cause was “obviously because they believe in something; the communists have conveyed to these men a clear picture of a program which they think will make life better. We have not. They are also well organized politically; we are not.”⁶⁷ Ignoring the problem’s political nature, the United States continued its military

64. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 7.

65. Quoted in Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 570.

66. Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 574-576.

67. Quoted in Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 225.

dominated approach in June 1964 by announcing retired General Maxwell Taylor as the new ambassador and General Westmoreland as the Commander of MACV.⁶⁸

The leadership change, however, failed to prevent the further deterioration. While the Viet Cong increased their attacks' frequency and effectiveness, the United States pursued the objective of a strong, effective South Vietnamese army. Despite increasing America's assistance, the ARVN's performance against the Viet Cong declined; and the South Vietnamese government appeared stagnant. As the United States offered more aid, the South Vietnamese willingly accepted it. South Vietnam, however, did not improve, mobilize their population, or hasten their military forces' reinforcement. During this period, American leaders contemplated doing the job themselves. Their Vietnamese ally continually failed to meet expectations. Little hope remained that South Vietnam could win the war by itself. The United States began to prepare itself to assume an expanded role. The Gulf of Tonkin incident and the subsequent Congressional resolution provided President Johnson authorization to fight the Communists, Viet Cong and North Vietnam directly.⁶⁹

By the summer of 1965, Americans no longer fought the war through advice and aid alone; there was now a massive US conventional military operation. Operation Rolling Thunder sought to demonstrate America's commitment through the gradual bombing of North Vietnam. The bombardments were intended to persuade the North to quit supporting the Viet Cong and to boost the South Vietnamese morale. Additionally, Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland called for a ground force commitment. This substantial offensive capability would hopefully convince the Viet Cong to abandon their cause. By the end of 1965, President Johnson had authorized the commitment of 200,000 troops, nearly matching Westmoreland's total request. The military infusion allowed the American military to fight the war without relying on its South Vietnamese counterparts. The hope was that when the insurgents were defeated and Hanoi's will was

68. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 235, & Nagl, "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam," 136-137.

69. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 277-278; Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 241; & Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 576-577.

broken, the South Vietnamese government could reform and re-establish its legitimacy with its populace.⁷⁰

The American military fought the Viet Cong and PAVN without regard for building Saigon's legitimacy or effectiveness. General Westmoreland claims to have "maintained all along that success in the South had to accompany bombing in the North if conclusive results were to be expected."⁷¹ Unfortunately, Westmoreland viewed "the U.S. military strategy employed in Vietnam, dictated by political decisions, was essentially that of a war of attrition."⁷² Westmoreland believed a massive ground assault into North Vietnam proved too politically risky for President Johnson. An invasion did not match America's objective to eliminate South Vietnam's communists. Additionally, Westmoreland believed the American public's impatience precluded the slow and steady progress of counterinsurgency's noncontiguous battlefield. The public wrongly expected a quick resolution with ground troops' authorization. "A war of attrition can never be concluded swiftly."⁷³

The American military transitioned to the offense. "Only a minimum numbers remained in static defenses, while the bulk of units pushed into the countryside, patrolling to find the enemy, attacking him, and preventing him from massing to hit the installations," recalls Westmoreland. "Those assignments made, my next consideration was the population. While depending on Vietnamese to protect Saigon proper, I needed American forces in the environs to help protect the surrounding population and prevent big enemy units from massing to move against the capital."⁷⁴ Upon finding the enemy, MACV directed units to kill as many Viet Cong or NVA as possible. The reliance on firepower caused civilian casualties, and the Americans did little to address these grievances. More significantly, the South Vietnamese government failed to reestablish its control and governance over the local populace in these newly clear areas.⁷⁵ The former Director of Operations for all US Army Forces in Vietnam and 1966-1967

70. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 284 and 440; Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 247-248; & Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 579-580.

71. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 126.

72. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 153.

73. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 153.

74. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 162.

75. Nagl, *Soup with a Knife*, 155.

Commander of 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam, Major General John Tillson, recollects, “A unit would pacify an area in Vietnam and wouldn’t hold it after a large operation and a year later would have to clear it again because the VC had reinfilitrated.”⁷⁶

Largely disregarding the importance of combined political and military efforts in counterinsurgency, the Americans continued large-scale military operations to attrite the enemy. The only exception was the assimilation of all American civilian and military pacification programs into Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in May 1967. By creating unified advisory teams, CORDS attempted to overcome the American civil-military tensions by creating a single chain of command for South Vietnam’s pacification. A single voice encouraged the South Vietnamese to do the things American viewed necessary to save their country.⁷⁷ Rufus Phillips recollects, “There was still, however, little coordination between pacification and what the American forces were doing. Vietnamese forces were still not picking up the slack, and local security remained neglected.”⁷⁸

CORDS’s initial success and the 1967 Vietnamese election results created concern for the communist insurgency. In an audacious move directed from Hanoi, the Viet Cong conducted a massive attack. In the 1968 Tet Offensive, Viet Cong infiltrators concentrated inside the larger South Vietnamese cities. Hoping to spark a general uprising, they boldly attacked the South Vietnamese government’s power centers and American bases. This crippling blow had three objectives: to force the South Vietnamese to accept a coalition government with the National Liberation Front; to convince the Americans to leave; and eventually, to allow a complete communist takeover. The Americans and ARVN slaughtered the Viet Cong as they emerged from their cover to fight in the open. Even conservative estimates conclude the Viet Cong had ten times as many deaths as America and South Vietnam combined. After three weeks, all the Viet Cong’s territorial gains returned to the American or South Vietnamese

76. Quoted in Nagl, *Soup with a Knife*, 155-156.

77. *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 622-623.

78. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 283.

control.⁷⁹ For Westmoreland, “it all added up to a striking military defeat for the enemy on anybody’s terms.”⁸⁰

The Viet Cong’s pervasive during the Tet Offensive, however, clearly indicated that no effective counterinsurgency campaign existed. Despite Westmoreland’s claim of victory, the Tet Offensive produced several Communist strategic successes. Depleted as a fighting force, the Viet Cong returned to Mao’s protracted warfare’s early phases to reconstitute their strength in order to fight another day. While the general popular uprising failed to materialize, the CORDS pacification program suffered a significant reversal. The creation of new refugees magnified these setbacks. The terror created by the attack reinforced the belief that the South Vietnamese government lacked the ability to secure its populace. Most importantly, the Tet Offensive cracked the will of the American people and president. Feeling betrayed by their government’s claims of winning the war, the American public became convinced the cost of South Vietnam’s freedom had become too high. President Johnson declined to authorize the requested further escalation of the war effort and began to explore options to withdraw and turn responsibility over to the South Vietnamese.⁸¹

Decision to Disengage

After the Tet Offensive, the Vietnam War became the prevalent American domestic issue. The Viet Cong seemed on the verge of victory in Washington, much like the Viet Minh had been in Paris during 1954. The American press proclaimed that the Vietnam War was destined to end as a stalemate, at best. The will of the politicians faltered as reporters continually highlighted the surprise and terrors of Tet. Shortly after the situation stabilized in South Vietnam, even President Johnson’s most trusted advisors began to advocate liquidating the war. In March 1968, President Johnson announced that he would not seek re-election and left his successor to manage the extrication of the 500,000 troops he committed to South Vietnam.⁸² This did not silence the American public’s protests. In April 1968, President Johnson summoned General Westmoreland to

79. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 282-285; Nagl, “Counterinsurgency in Vietnam,” 142; & Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 332-333.

80. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 332.

81. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 248-250 and Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 284.

82. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 670-672.

Washington to discuss his appointment as the Army Chief of Staff and candidates for his successor in Vietnam. “Before I departed again for Saigon, I flew with the President in his helicopter over downtown Washington, where fires set in widespread rioting and looting were still burning. It looked considerably more distressing than Saigon during the Tet offensive.”⁸³

During the 1968 presidential election, Richard M. Nixon promised to achieve honorable peace in Vietnam. Nixon sought this objective through a strategy of Vietnamization – turning responsibility over to the South Vietnamese and freeing American forces to withdraw. Henry Kissinger described the complex strategy as having three important components. First, troops returning home and a serious negotiation effort in Paris would reassure the American public of the administration commitment to end the conflict. Second, American efforts must create the necessary conditions and capabilities for South Vietnam to defend itself against the communist threat. Third, the North Vietnamese must choose between peace initiatives or massive military retaliation to prevent the appearance of a forced retreat. The administration understood the risk of failing to keep these items synchronized or time running out before completion. Vietnamization offered the best solution to the problems of extracting America from its twenty-year commitment of fighting communism in South Vietnam.⁸⁴

The ultimate objective remained communist defeat. The strategy emphasized strengthening the Vietnamese military and bolstering the government’s legitimacy. An influx of American material supplies accompanied an extensive training program to increase the combat capabilities of the South Vietnamese military. Concurrent with the Vietnamization program, the phased withdrawal of American combat troops continued, and the American administration began secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese leaders in Paris. By 1971, only 139,000 American military personnel remained in South Vietnam. Despite a failure in Operation Lam Son 719 and a near disaster during a March 1972 North Vietnam invasion, the Nixon Administration touted the Vietnamization program as a success. South Vietnam appeared ready to assume its own defensive burden. This ignored the extensive support from American airpower and naval forces to

83. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 362.

84. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 680-683.

prevent a total failure in both operations. Meanwhile, the Paris negotiations continued between the warring parties. Concerned over North Vietnamese stalling during peace negotiations, President Nixon ordered the bombings of sites in North Vietnam. After a week of bombing, the North Vietnamese leadership signed the peace treaty on 27 January 1973.⁸⁵

Long-term Outcomes after Withdrawal

For the United States, the Paris Peace Accords had two virtues: ending America's Vietnam War involvement and bringing home the prisoners of war. Capturing the feelings of many Vietnam veterans, General Westmoreland stated, "Perhaps there could be no rejoicing after such a long, costly struggle, one that for all the sacrifice of American fighting men and for all their obvious dominance on the battlefield came to no conclusive end but kind of petered out. Yet the nation appeared to breathe a collective sigh of relief that the American role was essentially over...."⁸⁶ For President Nixon, the Paris negotiations and Vietnamization achieved his peace with honor promise. This optimism, however, failed to be widely accepted by those familiar with the South Vietnam situation. Vietnamization still required time for further Vietnamese military developments, but the American departure increased the clock's speed.⁸⁷

The ARVN, with the assistance of American airpower, defeated the North Vietnam's invasion in March 1972. The dependence on American firepower augmentation proved fatal when the North invaded again in March 1975. Vietnamization taught the ARVN to fight an American-style war but failed to ensure an organic supply of air support, mobility, or ammunition. American sentiment prevented the re-introduction of military forces into South Vietnam. Attempts to elicit funds failed to resonate with a Congress that had lost interest and just wanted the Vietnam War to go away. From 1973 to 1975 despite the warnings of military officials and the requests of the President, Congress continued to reject military appropriations and aid packages for Saigon. As North Vietnam began its assault, the American government seemingly abandoned South

85. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 1-4.

86. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 395.

87. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 187-188.

Vietnam. Before the end of April 1975, the North Vietnamese Army occupied Saigon and united Vietnam under Communist rule.⁸⁸

Upon unification, the northern communists initiated a campaign of pure vengeance. Those southern governmental officials and private businessmen that avoided the mass executions suffered an average of 10 years in special indoctrination camps. The communists collectivized agriculture and forced more than a million urban dwellers to relocate and work farms in the rural economic zones. Discrimination against the South Vietnamese routinely denied employment, education, and burial rights. These policies resulted in an exodus of more than a million people to escape the harsh regime. More recently, the need for a market-based economy has created a much better living environment. The current situation in Vietnam presents a peaceful scene with growing prosperity as the nation attempts to further connect and integrate with the global community. But politically, the communists continue to rule with an iron hand.⁸⁹

Despite the belief in the domino theory, the Vietnam War did not end the Cold War, but it did have several negative effects on the United States. Influenced by isolationism and unilateralism, both the Democratic and Republican parties attacked the war powers of the president in an effort to curtail future involvement without more Congressional oversight. The necessary expenditure to wage the Vietnam War slowed American modernization programs and allowed the Soviet Union to achieve near parity. American military superiority became questionable, and potential adversaries reconsidered its deterrence value. NATO allies publically questioned the wisdom of fighting an inconsequential conflict while the Soviet threat to Europe intensified. The international community doubted America's willpower and capacity to respond militarily to future challenges. Questioning America's resolve to honor its commitments, allies reconsidered their relationship with the United States.⁹⁰ Since its withdrawal from Vietnam, America has struggled to reestablish its international image.

Insights

Even thirty years later, the Vietnam War experience continues to plague the United States. While the United States initially distanced itself from its failure,

88. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 201, 212, & 276 and Nagl, "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam," 146.

89. Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*, 304-305.

90. Millett and Maslowski, *For The Common Defense*, 570-572.

contemporary struggles against Iraqi and Afghan insurgents have resurrected American interest in the Vietnam conflict. American national leaders desire to leave behind tolerably functional and secure countries after the United States' withdrawal. The Vietnam War offers many insights that might prove useful in future situations.

Collective Amnesia. To sophomoric authorities, the Cold War's Soviet threat justified forgetting Vietnam's counterinsurgency lessons and a return to conventional operations. Small wars were not America's preference. Operation Desert Storm's impressive victory overshadowed the experiences of El Salvador, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. In its preferred style of warfare, the United States proved it could triumph. Focused on regime change, stunning successes resulted from the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. American conventional might, however, failed to achieve complete victory against the insurgencies that developed. The United States' government bungled initial attempts to establish new governments and conduct reconstruction.⁹¹ In 2006, former Army vice Chief of Staff, General Jack Keane, stated, "After the Vietnam War, we purged ourselves of everything that had to do with irregular warfare or insurgency, because it had to do with how we lost that war. In hindsight, that was a bad decision."⁹² Rediscovery of these lessons exacted a high price. America's adversaries refused to allow the United States to dictate the conflict's characteristics. Instead, the enemies chose to fight asymmetrically. The United States could choose to forego their objective or change how they approached the problem. As the United States improves its irregular warfare prowess, it risks a similar surprise from a threat that chooses more conventional tactics. To hedge against this risk, the United States must adopt a strategy and doctrine responsive to full spectrum or hybrid wars.

Political-Military Responsibility. The Department of Defense, especially the Army, continues to proclaim "No More Vietnams." This slogan conveys the notion that politicians should commit combat troops only when they intend to pursue victory wholeheartedly. To support victory, military leaders demand politicians provide the necessary resources, not overly constrain the war effort through minor political concerns, and sustain the will to endure the necessary costs. Most commonly, this insinuates that

91. Nagl, "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam," 146-148.

92. Interviewed on *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, Public Broadcasting System, 18 April 2006, Transcript found at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june06/rumsfeld_4-18.html (accessed 9 April 2009).

military force should only be committed to protect or pursue vital national interests. Finally, military leaders have become concerned that Vietnam's most popular metric, the body count, has created a casualty adverse populace. These factors continue to loom over contemporary decisions regarding strategy and military employment.⁹³

Culpability for Vietnam's mistakes, however, belongs to the military professional as well. Fulfilling their fundamental duties, general officers must provide civilian authorities accurate estimate of strategic probabilities and prepare their forces for the challenges of future wars. In Vietnam, the generals silently complied with the politicians' proposed strategy and did not offer alternatives compliant with the military's capabilities. The leaders blindly pursued conventional war without regard for the war's true nature. The generals failed to anticipate the battlefield challenges of their enemies. Despite their allies' experience and urging of President Kennedy, the military never fully adopted a counterinsurgency approach. This failure to develop an appropriate strategy and prepare for the war's demands contributed to America's dubious withdrawal.⁹⁴

Vietnamization. The concepts underlying the Vietnamization strategy were fundamentally sound. The problems resulted from implementation and the time allotted to achieve the strategy's goals. Allowing, or even forcing, the host nation to take more responsibility for its affairs remains a significant counterinsurgency tenet. Critical to implementation is waiting until the host nation's reach a baseline proficiency level. Originally, in 1950 the United States primarily advised and supported the South Vietnamese government and security forces. As it assumed a more direct combat role in 1965, America relegated the advisory mission to a much lower priority. Vietnamization became official policy in 1969 and lasted until the Paris Peace Accords of 1973. The ARVN and government made steady improvements throughout Vietnamization's four years, but the American forces withdrew at a faster pace. Instead of incrementally transitioning to Vietnamese control, the United States rushed the process. A rapid infusion of new equipment with limited familiarization training did not produce an effective fighting force; this required more time than American decision makers could provide. In many cases, ill-prepared units and organizations prematurely became solely

93. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 268-271.

94. LTC Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2007, <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/05/2635198> (accessed 10 January 2009).

responsible. Additionally, President Nixon's Watergate scandal provoked Congress to withhold promised and much needed support to the Republic of Vietnam from 1973-1975.⁹⁵ This countered the Vietnamization strategy's expected benefits. The ARVN required more time to become independently viable, but the Americans did not have the luxury of time.⁹⁶

Mirror Imaging. Throughout their advising mission, the United States focused on building the ARVN in the American military's image. An image primarily organized to combat the threat of invasion by the North Vietnamese. The training and experience taught the South Vietnamese to rely on airpower, an abundance of artillery support, and high-speed mobility. Unfortunately, the Americans habitually provided these capabilities and never concentrated on building similar South Vietnamese functions. Despite Vietnamization, South Vietnam could not execute their learned tactics against the North Vietnamese Army. The ARVN's firepower reliance did not translate into internal security for South Vietnam's populace. For the entire duration of the war, the Viet Cong remained influential throughout the countryside. Even the early American advisory efforts focused on building conventional capability and neglected the insurgent threat.

Legitimacy Building Lacking. CORDS showed promise to help the South Vietnamese government build legitimacy, but it remained separated from the larger military efforts. No single individual or office coordinated the American efforts inside Vietnam. The American military and the ARVN remained disconnected from other legitimacy building campaigns. Few decision makers considered placing the military effort subordinate to the political. Without the combined political-military effort, the militarily cleared territory lapsed back under Viet Cong control. No concentrated effort was made to expand governmental control into these areas. Too many Americans viewed Vietnam's problems as being purely military. Highlighting this problem, Henry Kissinger criticized America's Vietnam strategy in a 1969 *Foreign Affairs* article, "We fought a military war; our opponents fought a political one. We sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for our psychological exhaustion....The North Vietnamese used their main forces the way a bullfighter uses his cape – to keep us lunging into areas of

95. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 195.

96. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 278.

marginal political importance.”⁹⁷ The strategic changes of General Creighton Abrams and President Nixon occurred too late to change the outcome. The American people no longer supported the war effort and refused to tolerate the continued cost. Early in the war, the military dominated efforts wasted precious time and lacked an understanding of the true problem.

Insights for Withdrawal. America never created the necessary preconditions for long-term South Vietnamese independence. As the United States withdrew from the conflict, the South Vietnamese were incapable of countering the North’s conventional threat and were ill prepared for Viet Cong’s internal challenges. During the nineteen-year involvement, the American strategy overly focused on the military element. With the United States direct combat role, the ARVN never developed capabilities in anticipation of America withholding firepower support. When present, American military power countered the external threats, but opposing the internal threats required a legitimate government. Neglecting the political aspects, the United States never fully appreciated the necessary factors to achieve South Vietnam’s long-term stability. The rulers’ despotic nature and the resulting coups prevented enduring popular support development. Additionally, the frequent governmental changes prohibited initiating long-term legitimacy campaigns. American advisors never developed confidence in their counterparts and preferred to accomplish tasks personally. When the American strategy forced the Vietnamese to assume the primary role, time was not available to overcome the incompetence. Vietnamization allowed America to disengage with a façade of success. The 1975 television images, however, exposed the deception. South Vietnam could not provide their own security or legitimate governance to their population.

97. Henry Kissinger, “The Vietnam Negotiations,” *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 2 (January 1969), 214.

CHAPTER 3

The British Withdrawal from Malaya in 1960

After World War II, the British returned to Malaya to resume their colonial occupation in September 1945. As the British attempted to re-establish control after their four-year absence, they encountered violence resembling a postcolonial war to gain independence. As the conflict matured, the desire to defeat communism soon eclipsed the British goal of retaining a colony, and by 1957, Great Britain formally granted Malaya independence. Even after independence, the British assisted Malaya to defeat the communist guerrillas. For their sacrifices, the British retained access to Malaya's tin and rubber resources; and Britain created an ally that complemented their presence in Hong Kong. Lasting from 1948 to 1960, the Malayan Emergency was Britain's longest protracted conflict outside of Northern Ireland.¹

This chapter begins by examining the strategic environment surrounding and influencing the Malayan Emergency. It then assesses the insurgency's development and spread. Subsequently, the chapter considers the British desired outcomes and the results from the commitment of British troops to Malaya. An examination of the political decision to disengage follows. Next, the chapter identifies the long-term outcomes from the British withdrawal. It concludes with insights from the Malayan Emergency.

Strategic Context of the Malayan Insurgency

Historical Influences. In 1945, the population of Malaya totaled 5 million: 49% Malays, 38% Chinese, 12% Indians, and roughly 1% a mix of Europeans, Eurasians, and aborigine tribes. The immigrant Chinese and Indian residents retained their racial identity, but the Malay race was unique and the native inhabitants of the region. During the sixteenth century, Middle Eastern traders converted the native population to Islam. The Malay Sultans exercised long-standing sovereignty over the Malays and later maintained their rule through agreements with the British. The Malays enjoyed their relaxed tropical agrarian lifestyle. Malaya's expansive tin and rubber resources caused the British colonial interest to grow. To expand these industries, the British imported

1. Charles Townsend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 155.

Chinese and Indian laborers whom they believed to be more industrious in their nature. While many laborers returned to their homeland enriched by their hard work, many Chinese immigrants gained influence by becoming thriving commercial businessmen. According to Malayan law, however, immigrants never earned full citizenship.²

Seeking to unite the Chinese immigrants, the Malayan Communist Part (MCP) formed in 1930. Publicly, the MCP announced its purpose as ousting the British and establishing a communist regime. Ironically, the MCP did not receive guidance from Mao Zedong; rather, the Russians directed most of their activities. In the early years, Great Britain's Special Branch thwarted many of the MCP's operations and prevented any real progress toward their communist goals. The MCP, however, did gain sympathy in the Chinese communities.³

In 1941, two events caused the MCP to change directions: Russia and Great Britain united for World War II, and the Japanese invaded Malaya. While the Malays generally tolerated Japanese rule, the Chinese harbored a long-time hatred of the Japanese. The lack of active resistance led the Chinese to view the Malays as collaborating traitors. Russia directed the MCP to help the British against the Japanese, including the conduct of guerrilla warfare against Japan's rear areas. At the time, the British were struggling to reverse their failures in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. Desperately seeking allies that could counter the Japanese advance, the British gladly financed, trained, and equipped the MCP's guerrilla fighters. These efforts resulted in a 7,000-man Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) that enjoyed an extensive support network in the Chinese villages and farms dispersed throughout the Malayan jungle. The MPAJA, however, failed to influence Japan's operations significantly. Like the British, the Japanese neutralized the MCP and MPAJA through arrests, raids, and ambushes.⁴ Despite being a relatively insignificant nuisance, the MCP emerged from World War II claiming responsibility for the Japanese occupiers' defeat and gaining influence inside Malaya.⁵

2. Brigadier Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), 19-21.

3. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 13-14.

4. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 15-18 & 21.

5. John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 62.

As the British reoccupied Malaya in September 1945, they encountered an increase in the tension between the Malays and Chinese. Riots and racial violence plagued efforts to reestablish order. Still bitter toward the Malays' perceived cowardice, the predominantly Chinese MPAJA engaged in acts of civil unrest and violence. By December 1945, the British official successfully bribed the MPAJA to disband, but the MPAJA maintained its contacts and support structure through establishment of a fraternal organization. In a 1946 effort to reduce racial tensions, the British announced the creation of the Malayan Union. This new governmental agreement granted equal rights to Malays, Chinese, and Indians. But the proclamation failed to accomplish its intent. The Malays violently opposed the decision and refused to attend the inauguration of the new constitution. This reaction bolstered the Chinese immigrants' commitment to the Malayan Communist Party and encouraged a return to violent means to achieve their goals.⁶

Global Influences on the Malayan Insurgency. Like most conflicts of this age, the Malayan Emergency requires consideration of the Cold War's framework. When founded in 1930, the Malayan Communist Party established relationships with the Soviets, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and other communist revolutionaries. The victory of the communists over Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist Government in China and the early victories of North Korea inspired the MCP's struggles. These events indicated to some that communism had started an inevitable march across the globe.⁷

Malaya thus emerged as part of the West's broader struggle to quell the communist's tide. The French struggled against Ho Chi Minh in Indochina; and starting in 1950, the Americans led the efforts against the communist invasion of South Korea. Additionally, the Soviets and the Western powers neared direct confrontation over the Berlin Blockade and subsequent airlift from 1948-1949. In China, Mao Zedong's victory ended Western dominance of the region. The large Chinese population in Malaya justified growing fears of communism's intrusion. Because preventing the Soviet

6. Nagl, *Soup with a Knife*, 62.

7. Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 122.

dominance of Europe remained the paramount interest for the Western powers, Great Britain had to operate unilaterally against the communist threat in Malaya.⁸

Regional Influences. Despite Malaya's close proximity other communist uprisings, the Malayan Emergency had few significant regional influences. The MCP had contact with communist leaders such as Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh but never developed relationships beyond exchanging ideas, strategy, tactics, and public support statements.⁹ As a peninsula, Malaya shared its only border with Thailand. Jungle-covered mountains provided concealed passage between the two countries. Thailand never had a pressing security requirement to police this remote portion of its country. The British reluctance to violate Thailand's sovereignty created safe havens for the MCP's headquarters and retreating guerrilla forces.¹⁰ Despite the passive advantages brought by the Tai sanctuary, the lack of active support from the Tai government limited the sanctuary's advantages to the MCP. Thus, Malaya's counterinsurgency campaign significantly benefitted from not having a hostile neighbor and the peninsula's relative isolation.

British Domestic Influences. Great Britain's Far East interests were economic as much as they were strategic. Emerging from World War II, Great Britain faced the dilemma of needing colonial resources to support reconstruction, but it lacked the necessary resources to police the territories. By 1945, Britain received only £800 million from all its colonial possessions but annually invested over £2,000 million. In 1948, the Ministry of Defense faced a £125 million budget shortfall and received instructions to prepare for further reductions in subsequent years. A plethora of security problems confronted Great Britain. Planners faced the possibilities of nuclear war with the Soviet Union, conventional war in Europe, and policing the Empire's colonies.¹¹

To counter the last challenge, the British devised a strategy to create and nurture alliances in selected colonial territories. Great Britain hoped to inaugurate a new, mutually beneficial relationship. The colonies would export natural resources to Great Britain or its designee. In exchange, the colony received from the British a security pact,

8. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 122.

9. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 14.

10. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 187.

11. Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer M. Taw, *Defense Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict: The Development of Britain's 'Small Wars' Doctrine During the 1950's*, RAND Report R-4015-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), 4-5.

a new governmental relationship, and manufactured goods. This strategy required balancing the political freedoms and necessary security measures to achieve durable stability.¹²

As the British considered self-government or independence for its former colonies, the threat of communism's expansion tainted most Parliamentary debates. Czechoslovakia lost its democratically elected government to a communist coup d'état. The Soviet Union challenged the United States over the Marshall Plan and access to Berlin. Mao Zedong was achieving success in China, and Ho Chi Minh challenged the French in Indochina. Until the Korean War, the United States for the Far East remained reluctant to entangle itself beyond Japan's reconstruction and modest aid to the Philippines. Thus, Great Britain had to act unilaterally in Malaya.¹³

Galula's Model Applied to Malayan Insurgency

A Cause. Preferring stability to equality, the British abandoned the Malayan Union in 1948. The government reverted to the Federation structure, based on the rule of the Sultans. The return to the pre-war governmental structure excluded the Chinese from governmental positions and again denied them full rights of citizenship. In a nation they defended against Japanese invaders, the Chinese seemingly remained second-class citizens. The MCP exploited these grievances. Their message became that only the establishment of a communist regime's establishment could bring equality and fair government to Malaya.¹⁴ Because the Malayan Federal government ostracized the Chinese, the MCP had little competition for the immigrants' loyalty. As the MCP assumed a leadership role in the Chinese community, the government struggled in the rural areas to re-establish its legitimacy and public services.¹⁵

Counterinsurgent Vulnerability. World War II devastated the British economy. The British needed an uninterrupted natural resource flow, but they allocated little funding for reviving their colonies. The British also lacked the personnel with knowledge of Malaya to administer the country properly. The Malayans expected the

12. T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 75-76.

13. Phillip Deery, "Malaya, 1948: Britain's 'Asian Cold War'?" (Working Paper #3, The Cold War as a Global Conflict, International Center for Advanced Studies, New York University, 2002), 3-4.

14. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 24 & 26.

15. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, 52-53.

relative order and prosperity of the colonial rule would return with the British after World War II. Great Britain cobbled together the British Military Administration (BMA). The BMA's inept and poorly implemented policies alienated significant portions of nearly every section of Malaya's population.¹⁶

Three years after the return of the British, the Malayan people still had little confidence in their government. Initially, the BMA officials acted as if Malaya was a conquered country instead of an ally. Later, several administration officers were accused of corruption. When the BMA returned control to civilian government in April 1946, the majority of Malayan society felt disenchanted with the British return.¹⁷ The establishment of the Malayan Union outraged the Malays and sparked protests from July 1946 to February 1948. In response to the civil unrest, the British returned to the Federation Agreement in February 1948, thus, abandoning the Chinese and Indian communities. This bitterness and lack of confidence in the national government lingered long after the return of the Federation.¹⁸

The economic situation was near crisis. The Malayan population suffered from shortages and high prices of rice, a soaring cost of living, and unrealistically low wage levels. Malayan resentment grew over perceived exploitation in order to fund the reconstruction of Britain and its Empire. By 1946, the resurgence of rubber and tin's global demand allowed Malaya to contribute \$118 million (US) to Great Britain's import fund, three times the net contribution of all the other colonies. The Malayan economic frustrations triggered worker strikes and civil demonstrations. The government's reactions to quell these disturbances contributed to the doubts about its legitimacy. The government appeared to be pawns in the British hands, not representing Malaysans' true needs.¹⁹

The three-year struggle to return to pre-war normalcy created an opportunity for the communists to seize power. The Malayan Union's failed establishment, the Federation's subsequent restoration, and the economic turmoil nearly collapsed Malaya's fragile stability. The Malayan government and the British strained under the pressure to

16. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, 11.

17. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, 13-16.

18. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, 37.

19. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, 17-22.

restore order. The MCP unified the public's grievances into a national cause and often incited the police to over-react to mass protests. Through press coverage and the MCP's propaganda, the oppressive images conveyed the impression that communist rule promised a better alternative.²⁰



Figure 3 Malaya During the Emergency, 1948-1960

Source: *Malaya During the Emergency 1948-1960*, "Digger History: An unofficial history of Australian and New Zealand Armed Forces," <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-nz/nz-malaya.htm> (accessed 22 May 2009).

20. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 29-32.

Favorable Geography. South of Thailand, Malaya's five-hundred-mile peninsula juts into the South China Sea. The landmass approximately equals Florida in size. An impenetrable jungle dominates over four-fifths of Malaya's 50,850 square miles. This primordial jungle's suffocating heat and heavy rains have influenced every Malayan man, woman, and child's life.²¹ This oppressive climate fosters Malays' relaxed lifestyle. Running from north to south, a series of mountains climbs into the jungle and bisects the country. In several places, these hills rise to a height of seven thousand feet. The western portion of Malaya contained more roads, railroads, and small airfields than the eastern portion, which generally lacked infrastructure and development.²²

Few geographic factors limited access to Malaya. Shallow sandy beaches, within close proximity to the jungle's concealment, characterized most the 2,000 miles of Malayan coastline. The surrounding seas tended to be very calm and teemed with local fishing vessels that would disguise covert smuggling. Larger shipments of contraband material could utilize the overburdened free port of Singapore with little concern of detection. By land, the Thai border consisted of dense, mountainous jungles that could obscure the filtering of men and supplies from cross-border sanctuaries into Malaya. Even if deforested, the border would have proven difficult to guard without a substantial increase in police or military forces. The main battlegrounds around the dispersed villages more urgently needed the government's security forces. Even as late at 1955, the Thai government did little to reduce the Malayan guerrilla's safe haven in the deep jungle at the remote southern end of their country.²³

Malaya's jungles initially favored the Communist guerillas. They offered concealment for most insurgent operations and significantly hampered the efforts of non-locals penetrating their harsh environment. The thick canopy limited aerial reconnaissance's potential and reduced the effects of aerial or artillery bombardment. The dense vegetation also limited the visibility of ground forces to only a few feet in

21. Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerrillas 1948-1960* (London: Cassell, 1971), 13-15.

22. James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgencies and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 188.

23. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 152-153.

many places and allowed the guerrillas to escape from security forces when encounters took place. The general lack of roads denied government forces the ability to infiltrate and favored ambush tactics. The communist insurgents also benefitted from an informant network and caches among the widely dispersed Chinese squatter farms.

Outside Support. Although leaders of the MCP attended a number of external conferences, they garnered their support mainly from internal sources.²⁴ As previously mentioned, few geographic factors would have hindered external supplies and fighters from entering Malaya. The MCP, however, chose to follow Mao Zedong's doctrine of obtaining supplies and recruits from the local populace. Brigadier Clutterbuck explains the reasoning for this decision, "It was easier to get ammunition or food by raiding a police post two miles away than by land or sea from Peking. I think that is the real explanation. They never really tried. They obtained all their material internally. The same holds for recruits. Local people were far better and far more effective as guerrillas than any imported from outside."²⁵

If the MCP had sought assistance, it is unlikely the Soviets or the Chinese would have intervened directly. In Southeast Asia, the Soviets preferred to avoid direct involvement and utilized the Chinese to distribute their material and financial aid to Communist insurgent groups. As the Malaya insurgency developed, the Chinese had higher priorities. Still consolidating from their victory over Chiang Kai-shek, China had not yet developed a robust external support network. Even though aligned with their interests, China's involvement in the Korean conflict prevented it from supporting the MCP and other groups throughout the region.²⁶ Thus, there is little evidence to support the claim that the Soviet Union or China dictated the MCP's strategy. Despite adopting the Cold War's rhetoric, the MCP operated independently in its attempts to seize power.²⁷

24. Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 40.

25. Quoted in A.H. Peterson, G.C. Reinhardt, and E.E. Conger, eds., *Symposium on the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: The Malayan Emergency* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, July 1963), 18.

26. Peterson et al., *The Malayan Emergency*, 19.

27. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 145.

British Goals for Troop Commitment

The Malayan Communist Party failed to gain influence through labor strikes and to gain representation through legal means. Through the trade and labor unions, the communists attempted to stage work stoppages to gain governmental concessions. The government, however, did not violently react, instead they passed legislation preventing the professional communists from holding union official positions. After the MCP's initial success, the unions' members began ignoring the call for strikes. Additionally, their attempts to build coalition parties to influence elections failed to gather support.²⁸

As a result, the MCP graduated to more traditional insurgent tactics in 1948. Open violence typically manifested itself in two forms: attacks by armed guerillas and riots by unarmed crowds. The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army resurfaced under a different name, the Malayan People's Anti-British Army (MPABA). Through the MPABA, the MCP initiated a coordinated terror campaign: assassinating governmental officials, intimidating governmental collaborators, ambushing security forces, raiding supply depots, and coercing rural villagers. Continuing its campaign of civil demonstrations, the MCP mobilized crowds and roused them into a fury. The MCP intended crowds to provoke a violent security force reaction. Initially, the security forces responded repressively to these provocations, but later in the conflict, they adopted more disciplined and non-violent countermeasures. Often these earlier reactions became fuel for the communist propaganda machine and tools for recruiting more supporters. Additionally, the MCP began to assert itself as the legitimate governing body for much of the rural portions of Malaya, long neglected by the government.²⁹

Under pressure from the Malayan Federal Government, the British High Commissioner declared a state of emergency on 17 June 1948. Despite its high level of violence, the conflict never earned the title of *war*, but remained an emergency for the next twelve years. Various justifications were put forth for maintaining this political fiction. The economic justification was that British insurance companies covered property losses from riots and civil commotions in an emergency, but not during a civil

28. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 25-28.

29. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 29-34.

war.³⁰ Psychologically, the Colonial Secretary in 1950 reasoned that terming the effort a war would prohibit the ruthless treatment of prisoners and encourage adherence to international conventions.³¹ Most importantly, by not declaring war or martial law, the British established that the local political power controlled the operations of military, police, and other governmental agencies.³² This decision created a unified command structure and maintained the unity of effort to defeat the communists. In this strategic arrangement, the military forces remained subordinate to and coordinated with the political efforts.

Nevertheless, the British government proved reluctant to abandon its colonial partnership with Malaya. Great Britain needed the tin and rubber exports to continue the recovery from World War II. While British officials desired to avoid eroding civil liberties and appearing authoritarian, the uncontrolled violence threatened the cultivation of a friendly Malaya. Restoring public confidence in the local government required significant actions.³³ The MCP's use of terror forced the government to choose between social welfare for the loyal and the uncommitted and repressive measures against the insurgents. This tension existed throughout the Emergency, and the government continually had to balance its military and civilian operations.³⁴ Public support and economic improvement were vital to sustain rubber and tin access. To achieve security and stability, the British had to suppress the communist terrorists (CTs) and their criminal influences. The deliberate decision to label the insurgents as *terrorists* helped generate popular understanding for the security measures.³⁵

Situation after British Troop Commitment

The declaration of the Malayan Emergency granted legal approval for the broad measures to control the violence and to neutralize the CTs. Everyone over twelve years old had to register at the local police station and maintain an identification card on their person. Resettlement, moving individuals in or out of a specified area, also became a legal method for population control. Without a warrant or trial, the police force could

30. Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 11.

31. Quoted in Townsend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, 157.

32. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 36-37.

33. Harper, *The End of Empire and making of Malaya*, 147-148.

34. Harper, *The End of Empire and making of Malaya*, 155.

35. Nagl, *Soup with a Knife*, 95.

arrest and detain suspected communist supporters. To safeguard against this provision's abuse, an independent civilian review board regularly examined each case in an open forum. The security forces could also search private property without a warrant. This allowed for temporary hasty checkpoints and no-notice village inspections. Possession of an unauthorized weapon required a mandatory death sentence. Prisoners could seek a commuted sentence through cooperation with the police. If the situation warranted, local officials could impose curfews within their jurisdictions. Additionally, local officials could impose food control to prevent the population from supporting the guerrillas. Strict rationing and confiscation of excess foodstuffs prevented the CTs from creating caches throughout the Chinese villages.³⁶

Initially, the Malayan Emergency provisions placed the population in the unenviable position of choosing between two equally disdainful options. As with most wars, the outcome at the start was uncertain. Through its extreme measures of coercion and enforcement, the government hoped to discourage Malaysans from joining or supporting the Communist guerrillas. However, the suspension of personal liberties resulted in many people, particularly among the Chinese community, sympathizing with the cause of the MCP. Simultaneously, the MCP increased its violent attacks to eliminate the security forces; to continue disrupting the economy; to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the British-backed government; and to extort money, supplies, and recruits from the Malayan population.³⁷

From its initiation in 1948 until the end of 1951, the Emergency's violent struggle grew in intensity. The MCP continued to spread public dissatisfaction over the shortages of food, the escalating cost of living, the apparent corruption in the Malayan government, and the repressive measures adopted by the security forces. Especially in the rural villages and squatter farms, the MCP gathered food, information, funds, and recruits to support its guerrilla bands. By the end of 1951, conservative estimates indicated that roughly 8,000 CTs, 13,000 active supporters, and 130,000 sympathizers constituted the Malayan insurgency. The MCP steadily increased its violent confrontations with the government. During 1951, the annual death toll peaked with the deaths of more than 500

36. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 37-40.

37. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 66.

security force members, 500 civilians, and 1000 insurgents.³⁸ Most significantly, the CTs successfully ambushed and killed the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney in October 1951. Gurney's death prompted questions about the existing policy's strategic direction and its limited achievements.³⁹

On the government's side, the security forces' growth matched the MCP. British and Commonwealth infantry battalions went from 10 to 19 by October 1950. By early 1950, the police force grew from 10,000 to 17,000 and recruited an additional 30,000 special constables. Due to suspicion of the Indians and Chinese, the Malayan security force growth recruited primarily from Malays.⁴⁰ By May 1950, the British published a new Malayan strategy, *The Briggs Plan*, named after its author, Sir Harold Briggs, Director of Operations 1950-1952. It clearly articulated five vital tasks:

- 1) Resettle rural ethnic Chinese from dispersed rural areas to plantations and tin mines.
- 2) Substantially strengthen the Malayan administration.
- 3) Establish a structure for civil administration, police, and military officials at all levels a chance to meet regularly to collaboratively improve governmental performance and policy development.
- 4) Build access roads to create a police and administration permanent presence in all populated areas.
- 5) Maintain military control of all cleared areas to prevent Communist reoccupation.

The Briggs Plan intended to progress systematically northward along the peninsula. Despite its ambitious timetable, the plan's execution foundered in its early days. The lack of an effective British organization prevented unified action. The Malayan government's rapid growth sacrificed proper training and preparation. Leaders were frustrated with the lack of quick results. The MCP's separation from the Chinese population required time.⁴¹

38. Dr. Richard Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds: The Evolution of British Strategy in Malaya 1948-60," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, Ed. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 114.

39. Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, 159.

40. Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy," 114.

41. Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy," 118-120, and Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 116-117.

In February 1952, General Sir Gerald Templer, the new High Commissioner, arrived in Malaya. Changes in British policy combined the posts of High Commissioner and Director of Operations. Templer now possessed greater political and military power than any British soldier had enjoyed since Cromwell. Templer was a dynamic, unconventional figure with immense energy.⁴² In the British directive appointing Templer, the opening line stated, “The policy of the British Government is that Malaya should in due course become a fully self-governing nation.”⁴³ Sensing the existing plan was working, Templer made no major changes. Fighting the impatience of the British and the Malayan populace, Templer refused to transition rapidly to self-government. In his mind, independent government should occur only when the Malayans proved strong enough to prevent racial violence, to provide their own security, and to confront the challenges of poverty.⁴⁴ Defeating the CTs remained a high priority, but Templer believed, “The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people.”⁴⁵

Templer’s *hearts-and-minds* concept did not require that the population like the government. Instead, the approach focused on the population’s self-interest. David Kilcullen defines the components as:

- Hearts: the population must be convinced that our success is in their long-term interests.
- Minds: the population must be convinced that we actually are going to win, and we (or a transition force) will permanently protect their interests.⁴⁶

The population must make a permanent choice to embrace the government instead of the enemy. This population focus does not preclude military action. Instead, killing the enemy without harming innocent civilians helps build governmental legitimacy.⁴⁷

Templer realized that no victory would be permanent unless the Malayan government earned a significant portion of Chinese population’s loyalty. Operationally,

42. Barber, *The War of Running Dogs*, 174.

43. Quoted in Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 80.

44. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 80-81.

45. Quoted in Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 3.

46. David Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice, 2007” (lecture, Small Wars Center of Excellence, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA, 26 September 2007), slides available at <http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/> (accessed 9 March 2009), slides 55.

47. Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” slides 52-55.

the campaign combined a large-scale food denial with local security force patrolling. Resettlement brought the rural Chinese to more easily defended areas. Security forces worked to prevent the guerillas from infiltrating the villages. Practices included random searches, strict ID card enforcement, intelligence development through captured CTs, and randomly patrolling the surrounding area. To pressure the insurgents, the British implemented a strict food denial program. Villagers could only possess sufficient food to support their families. Searches prevented stockpiling, and the authorities confiscated excesses. Insurgents who used coercive measures against villagers to provide food damaged the communists' reputation. The Malayan administration rewarded villagers offering reliable information about the CTs or the MCP.⁴⁸

Governmental policy advertised that as individual villages were declared secure, the administration would rescind the Emergency's restrictive regulations. This provided the populace a positive incentive to side with the government and provide information on the CTs. The Malayans could not idly wait for the conflict's conclusion but had to pick a side to support. Eventually, the villagers migrated toward the Malayan government and forced the insurgents to retreat further into the jungle. By 1954, Templer declared several portions cleared of CTs and lifted nearly all the restrictive Emergency Regulations.⁴⁹

From 1952-1954, improved intelligence gathering techniques significantly increased military effectiveness. The government's operations forced the MCP on the defensive. Military forces increasingly disrupted CT attacks and captured MCP members. The captured guerrillas provided more intelligence, which further increased the security force's effectiveness. As more areas fell under governmental control, the MCP found its support base increasingly reduced.⁵⁰ The CTs struggled to reconstitute their units after engagements. By mid-1954, the British estimated that the CTs had lost over two thirds of their strength at this point. Templer feeling confident in the progress made by the government and fearing his own positive reputation would endanger the upcoming Malayan independence, he requested reassignment.⁵¹

48. Townsend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, 161-164.

49. Townsend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, 164.

50. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 189-191.

51. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 112-113.

Immediately before his departure, Templer announced that Malaya would hold its first national election for the Federal Legislative Council by mid-1955. These elections signaled the start of Malaya's independence and self-governing process. Templer's departure also ended the consolidation of authority. The positions of High Commissioner and Deputy of Operations were again separated and respectively assigned to Donald MacGillivray and General Sir Geoffrey Borne. While Borne managed the security operations, MacGillivray oversaw Malaya's significant political advances.⁵² Although 25,000 British troops remained in Malaya and violent clashes still occurred, in 1955 the confrontation moved from bullets to the ballot.⁵³

Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Malay, emerged from the 1955 federal election as the chief minister. He unified the largest ethnically based political parties into the Alliance Party. The Alliance Party became closely associated with rising Malayan nationalism. The divergent interests of the Malays, Chinese, and Indians made obtaining a single national policy difficult. After significant debate and concessions, the Alliance Party presented a unified front. In the election, the Alliance Party won fifty-one of the fifty-two seats on the Legislative Council, the other seat going to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party.⁵⁴

The animated political campaigning leading up to the 1955 federal election significantly boosted the counterinsurgency effort. The political system offered the population a legitimate means to address prevalent grievances. Unlike previous elections, citizens and candidates voiced anti-British sentiment, government criticism, future independence desires, and other controversial positions. The now population had a legal alternative to armed insurgency, and the politically active Malaysans viewed the MCP as increasingly irrelevant. Without its primary cause, the MCP lost influence to the legitimate political process.⁵⁵

In December 1955, the MCP recognized its growing weakness and sought a political solution. Premier Rahman conducted the negotiations with the MCP with no British involvement. The government's terms demanded the guerillas surrender, abandon

52. Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 244-245.

53. Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 265.

54. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 218.

55. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 218-219.

communist activities, and pledge their loyalty to the government. In exchange, it offered amnesty and help in social reintegration. Those refusing to renounce communism would remain confined or if they preferred be repatriated to China. The MCP agreed to pledge full support to the new administration and disband its army. In exchange, the MCP asked authority to operate as a legal political party that would pursue legal means to advance its agenda. Rahman refused to grant the MCP legitimacy status. He was unwilling to accept potential communist subversion after a future British withdrawal. Rahman viewed Communism as incompatible with the Malayan way of life. Thereupon, the MCP retreated into the jungle and resumed its desperate effort. Rahman, however, felt confident of both Malayan and British support.⁵⁶

Decision to Disengage

Capitalizing on his new prestige, Rahman traveled to London and convinced the British Government to grant independence effective 31 August 1957. This fulfilled the British policy outlined in the 1952 directive appointing Templer as the High Commissioner. The disengagement decision, however, traced its origins ultimately to the 1945 British policy to build new partnerships in its colonial territories. Constrained by resources, Great Britain could not assume sole responsibility for colonial administration, security, and development. The British groomed indigenous Malayans to assume prominent roles in the colony's administration. Almost immediately after World War II, the British began sharing power with the Malayans. From 1948 – 1955, the British gave the Malayans a legislative minority. Despite their subordination to the British authorities, the arrangement forced the Malayans to view solving governmental problems as being partially their responsibility. From 1955-1957, the Malayans enjoyed an elected majority, only subordinate to the High Commissioner's veto. This self-government phase marked an increase in Malayans replacing British governmental authorities. After independence, Great Britain did not immediately abandon Malaya. Several officials remained as employees of the new Malayan government. Others remained as advisors until the Malayans gained confidence in their position.⁵⁷

Long-term Outcomes after Withdrawal

56. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 135-137 and Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 226-227.

57. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 139-148.

The final stage of the war began with Malayan independence on 31 August 1957. The elected government persecuted the war with renewed vigor. Under the Anglo-Malayan Defense Pact, British troops remained in the country and were responsible to the Malayan government. With more than half of Malaya declared communist-free, the military efforts focused on remote jungle areas. Rahman supplemented the military campaign with a new amnesty offer for CTs willing to leave the MCP. By the end of 1959, desperate for food and tired of fighting, many CTs accepted the government's offer. At this time, only 250 guerillas were estimated to remain inside Malaya. Only the Thai border area remained problematic. The MCP conceded military defeat in the early part of 1960. On 31 July 1960, the Malayan government declared the Emergency over.⁵⁸

Describing the Emergency's end, Tunku Abdul Rahman stated, "During the last years of the war, more roads were built, more jungles cleared, bridges and water systems constructed, schools and hospitals started, than had been done in the last three generations. We were not fighting the Communist terrorists with arms alone. We went a long way to win the hearts and minds of our people. We gave the people more than the Communists could ever hope to give."⁵⁹

Since its victory, Malaya – now part of the greater Malaysia – remains free, prosperous, and racially tolerant. The demands of fighting a counterinsurgency campaign significantly shaped the centralized federal system governmental system. No insurgent organization has posed a significant threat to the government since the twelve-year Emergency. The Malaysian government still contends with guerrilla bands roving the jungles near the Thai border, but these groups remain isolated from the general population. Their aims resemble those of bandits than of insurgents. The Malayan prosperity has inoculated its people from the sway of communism. The country remains stable and continues to benefit from the 1980's rapid economic growth.⁶⁰

Insights

The British and Malayan successful counterinsurgency produced some general insights. While every war has its own unique characteristics, some of these could be transferrable to similar situations.

58. Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 304-305 and 319-320.

59. Quoted in Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 320.

60. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 242 and Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 326-327.

Long-term Plan for Independence. Post-World War II British colonial policy rested on the collaboration of energetic local leadership. While it still required access to natural resources, Britain could not afford to resume its pre-World War II colonial policy role. Instead, the British sought to create a partnership with the newly reoccupied Malaya. Unable to anticipate the social turmoil, the British attempted to bolster their legitimacy by incorporating Malays into the governmental structure. As the Emergency developed, the British placed more Malayans in governmental positions. This helped diffuse the MCP's British imperialism rhetoric. Additionally, early in the Emergency, the British publicly announced that Malaya would receive its independence when the country was sufficiently stable to stand on its own. This further eroded the MCP's cause. Instead of fighting to maintain long-term control, the British fostered an aligned Malayan regime capable of self-governance.

Establishing a controlling regime and quickly withdrawing did not guarantee the government's long-term success. The eighteen months between the announcement and actual Malayan independence temporally prohibited training competent governmental officials. Instead, the British cultivated suitable replacements. This was especially true for the creation of Malayan security forces. The transition to Malayan governmental control went extremely smoothly. The British made great efforts not to appear to abandon Malaya. Additionally, the British officials continued to work behind the scenes with the Malayan government. These authorities helped their Malayan superiors gain confidence, competence, and experience before they had to assume independent responsibility. Often these British individuals became Malayan governmental employees.

Civil Supremacy. Throughout the Malaya Emergency, the political leaders directed and guided the military effort. The British colonial structure ensured the High Commissioner supervised his Director of Operations. While Templer combined the responsibility in one person, he never confused the priorities. To Templer, “any idea that the business of normal civil government and the business of the Emergency are two separate entities must be killed for good and all. The two activities are completely and

utterly interrelated.”⁶¹ He argued further, “You cannot divorce them unless you admit that the military side is the main thing which matters in the Emergency and that must be wrong – absolutely wrong.”⁶² The insurgency’s defeat was only a small, but significant, portion of Malaya’s independence process.⁶³ General Templer instructed his subordinates to remember, “The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people.”⁶⁴ Templer deserves great credit for Malaya’s success, but most of the programs started before his arrival and continued after his departure. Britain’s strategy for the Emergency placed the military subordinate to the political effort, and British leaders ensured the execution never got confused.

Village Relocation. The relocation of a significant number of Malayans did not endear the government to the populace, but affection was never the British goal. Instead, relocation accomplished two significant counterinsurgency objectives. First, it physically separated the population from the insurgents. Second, relocation concentrated the citizens to facilitate security from insurgent coercion and reprisal attacks. Combined with food denial, the Malayans had to choose between the government and the MCP. To remain legitimate, the government ensured that the villagers had enough food to sustain their families. But they had no more. Thus, to feed themselves, the CTs had to extort rations from the people. But by resorting to coercive measures, the communists damaged their image and pushed the population toward the government. These threats often produced reports to the Malayan security forces. Sound intelligence guided operations to neutralize the MCP even further. In the end, the CTs had no population base and withered in the jungle.

While village relocation and food denial programs prove objectionable, the two objectives remain significant in a counterinsurgency. The United States’ Vietnam efforts proved that simply copying the British programs did not guarantee success. The Vietnamese context and the American bungling execution undermined the direct transfer of the technique. The British carefully balanced their programs to convince the Malayans that their interests aligned with the government and not the MCP. The Americans in

61. Quoted in Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, 177-178.

62. Quoted in Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 147.

63. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 80-81.

64. Quoted in Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 3.

Vietnam and the Malayan CTs discovered policy enforcement via terror provides few benefits.

Building Intelligence Networks. Much of the British success flowed from their efforts to build a significant intelligence network. The expanded security force interacted daily with the people in their zone. The villagers had foodstuffs replaced for reliable information on the CTs committing the extortion. An extensive amnesty program encouraged the captured CTs to work with the government. As the government proved its legitimacy, more citizens willingly provided information on the MCP. Most significantly, the Malayans wanted protection from the communist reprisals. Brigadier Clutterbuck discussed the importance of willing civilian involvement, “a prosperous people will tell him to go away – and then will inform the police. That is the real measure of a victory over insurgency.”⁶⁵

Insights for Withdrawal. Immediately after World War II, the British planned for Malayan independence. Great Britain had no desire for permanent governance over the territory. The combined Anglo-Malayan effort to build a government and husband its legitimacy led the population to reject the MCP. Additionally, Great Britain never made the Malayan regime solely dependent on the British for administration, security, or governance. Instead of dependence, the British cultivated a relationship of mutual benefit. Thus, the Malayan independence came about relatively smoothly. Rather than abruptly abandoning the government, Britain gradually withdrew as the Malayans demonstrated their competence. This transition included placing British Army under the authority of the Malayan government. When the communist insurgency crumbled, Malaya emerged on a solid footing. Ultimately, this positive result was the product of two factors – enlightened British policy and strategy; and the emergence of a capable and relatively uncorrupt group of politicians and administrators from among the Malayan people.

65. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 179.

CHAPTER 4

The American Withdrawal from El Salvador in 1988-1989

From the late 1940's until the early 1970's, El Salvador's National Conciliation Party (PCN) maintained a stable government despite several unresolved internal issues. But the facade of a constitutional government and manipulation of elections prevented genuine democratic development. Throughout the 1970's, new political organizations challenged the political system. This political reform culminated in October 1979 with the toppling of the government and the emergence of a center-left junta. The new government promised extensive political and economic reforms. Attempting to capitalize on turmoil in the aftermath of the regime change, the Salvadoran Marxists initiated an insurgency to seize power. On 16 January 1981, President Jimmy Carter resumed financial aid and military assistance to El Salvador which had been suspended in 1979. American commitment steadily increased until its withdrawal in 1989. After failing in their violent struggle for control, the insurgents signed a peace treaty in 1992, ended their armed struggle, demobilized, and began participating in the legal political process. With only a relatively modest commitment of men, money, and material, the United States helped El Salvador defeat a robust insurgency. El Salvador's victory marks the most successful American-supported counterinsurgency since 1960.¹

This chapter begins by examining the strategic context surrounding and influencing the Salvadoran insurgency. Through the lens of Galula's model, it then assesses the development and spread of the conflict. Subsequently, the chapter highlights the American objectives for the conflict and outlines the changes resulting from the commitment of American troops. Returning to Galula's model, it examines how the failure to resolve the prerequisites contributed to the political decision to disengage from this conflict. The chapter identifies the long-term outcomes from the withdrawal of American troops. It concludes with insights from El Salvador's insurgency.

1. Angel Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," *Money in the Bank: Lessons from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations*, RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 4 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), 39-47.

Strategic Context of the El Salvadoran Insurgency

Historical Influences. The Spanish first sighted the land that would become El Salvador in 1522. After several clashes with the natives, they established a permanent settlement in 1526. After another eleven years, they established sufficient control over the indigenous population to consider them colonial subjects. In 1821, nearly three hundred years later, along with most of Central America, El Salvador achieved its independence from Spain.² After centuries of Spanish domination over the indigenous population, El Salvador's post-colonial society was oligarchic. Economic and political elites, mostly of European extraction, constricted the upward mobility of the poor, native working class. This division transformed into oppression.³

The Spanish colonial rule created several persistent patterns characterizing El Salvador's history. Dr. Tommie Sue Montgomery describes them as follows:

1. An economic cycle of booms and depressions that replayed itself as variations on a theme several times between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries
2. Dependence on a monocrop economy as the key to wealth, a focus that led to dependence on outside markets
3. Exploitation of the labor supply, first the Indians and later the peasants
4. Concentration of the land in the hands of an ever-decreasing number of proprietors
5. Extreme concentration of wealth in few hands, coupled with the utter deprivation of the overwhelming majority of the population
6. A laissez-faire economy philosophy and an absolute belief in the sanctity of private property
7. A classical liberal notion of the purpose of government – to maintain order
8. Periodic rebellion by exploited segments of the population against perceived injustices⁴

Instability, internal and external, haunted El Salvador's early history. In July 1823, joining five other newly independent Central American states, El Salvador formed

2. Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 25-26.

3. Major M. Chris Herrera, U.S. Army, and Major Michael G. Nelson, U.S. Air Force, "Salvadoran Reconciliation," *Military Review*, July-August 2008, 24.

4. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 25.

the federation, United Provinces of Central America. After only fifteen years, the federation dissolved over economic issues. Again, in 1872 to 1898, El Salvador attempted to reestablish an isthmian federation, but the effort lost support after one of El Salvador's frequent coups.⁵

By 1875, coffee's high price pulled El Salvador into the world market. Coffee trees thrived in El Salvador's high altitudes. Wealthy landowners expanded their Spanish colonial lands for raising livestock and growing indigo into large coffee plantations. Through force or legislation, these elites then usurped Indian communal lands to expand their holdings. This bound the local citizens to the plantation because they could not grow their own food. The rural inhabitants received meager wages for their seasonal labor, while the few large landowners enjoyed the coffee profits.⁶ From the oligarchy's viewpoint, the backward and illiterate natives were incapable of responding to the new market conditions. The collective good would benefit by allowing *los Catorce*, or *The Fourteen*, to manage the land. Although slightly inaccurate, the peasant used the term, *The Fourteen*, to describe the interrelated landowning families. The exaggeration's use emphasized the landed elite's small number, the social structure's rigidity, and the narrow distribution of political power.⁷

Five large popular uprisings occurred from 1872 to 1898. During this time, most Salvadoran presidents were not only generals but also large landowners. The oligarchy began to solidify its influence. *The Fourteen* sought governmental policies aligned with their interests: encouraging coffee production, connecting the fields and ports via railroad, eliminating Indian communal lands, requiring accused vagrants to accept low-wage plantation jobs, and rapid repression of peasant unrest. To diffuse opposition, the 1886 constitution established a secular state, decentralized state authority through popular elections of municipal authorities, and guaranteed the sanctity of private property. In response, the oppressed peasants began to question their exploitation, hunger, and lack of opportunities.⁸

5. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 28.

6. Anjali Sundaram and George Gelber, eds., *A Decade of War: El Salvador Confronts the Future* (London: CIIR, 1991), 10.

7. Liisa North, *Bitter Grounds: Roots of Revolt in El Salvador* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1981), 17-19.

8. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 28-34.

By 1911, labor organizations had rapidly proliferated across El Salvador. In mid-1918, many of the smaller unions had united to form the Great Confederation of Workers of El Salvador (COES). By the 1920's, the COES's inclusiveness alienated its more radical members, which began to form militant splinter groups. As coffee prices plunged during the Great Depression, the militant groups initiated organized demonstrations and strikes.⁹ Without land to farm, the peasants could not sustain themselves on the reduced wages paid by the coffee plantations. Still, the increased misery failed to incite open rebellion. Arturo Araujo, the extremely popular head of the Labor Party, diffused tensions by promising agrarian reform and municipal elections.¹⁰

Fearing a communist or populist victory in the planned local elections, *The Fourteen* sponsored a coup. Araujo was overthrown and General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, his Minister of War, assumed the presidency. Concentrated in western El Salvador, the well-organized peasant unions followed the communist party's declaration of open revolt on 22 January 1932. But the abortive rebellion disintegrated in just two days.¹¹

President Martinez quickly ordered his heavily armed security force to recapture the rebel occupied towns and lands. The traumatic and bloody operation became known as *La Matanza*, the massacre. During the reoccupation, Martinez's forces slaughtered between 10,000 and 50,000 Indians, with 30,000 being the most common estimate. During the initial rebellion, the rebels used machetes and outdated guns to kill 21 people. In resisting Martinez's forces, the most liberal estimates indicate that only 100 governmental personnel died.¹² One historian referred to the event as "a battle of machetes against machine guns."¹³

The oligarchy heralded Martinez as El Salvador's savior against the growing communist threat. Exploiting *La Matanza* and the renewed elite support flowing from it, the president consolidated his rule. Under a subsequent governmental reorganization, the Armed Forces of El Salvador (ESAF) became the dominant political actor. ESAF

9. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 34.

10. North, *Bitter Grounds*, 29 & 34.

11. Sundaram and Gelber, *A Decade of War*, 12.

12. North, *Bitter Grounds*, 38-39.

13. Clifford Krauss, *Inside Central America: Its People, Politics, and History* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 62.

controlled the political process, ran the government, and kept order on behalf of *The Fourteen*.¹⁴ This arrangement prevented the formation of any civil service or responsive civil government. Multiple forms of corruption, mainly bribes, augmented the military leadership's salaries and provided a comfortable retirement. The highest levels of leadership remained politicized and always ensured the ESAF's best interest in national-level decision-making.¹⁵

The ESAF organized itself to maintain its power and operated repressively. Responsible for external security, the Army became a garrisoned force with mainly ceremonial contact with the population. Internal security forces consisted of the National Police, the Treasury Police, and the National Guard. The National Police and the Treasury Police controlled the large urban areas. Being primarily responsible for the rural areas, the National Guard relied on small garrisons in villages. Their brutality followed a simple process: use presence and threats of violence to maintain authority; manipulate intelligence networks to identify dissidents; and eliminate the troublemakers.¹⁶

La Matanza gave the oligarchy the political stability and freedom to take drastic measures to rebuild the crippled economy. *The Fourteen* remained extremely influential in economic and social policy but did not have a direct role in national government. The government outlawed labor unions and all other peasant organizations, including the Communist Party.¹⁷ Despite their continued subjugation, the peasants did not challenge the oligarchy. Memories of *La Matanza*'s indiscriminate violence precluded Indian attempts at self-organization for nearly three decades. For protection from further retribution, the Indians renounced their traditional Indian language, customs, and dress.¹⁸

The fifty years following *La Matanza* brought numerous leadership changes but little variation in political arrangements. The political cycle generally followed the pattern outlined by Dr. Montgomery:

14. Todd Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Lessons from Central America* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 76.

15. Major Robert J. Coates, USMC, "The United States' Approach to El Salvador," 1991, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991/CRJ.htm> (accessed 24 April 2009).

16. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 76.

17. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 37-39.

18. Sundaram and Gelber, *A Decade of War*, 12.

- Consolidation of power by the new regime
- Growing intolerance of dissent and increasing repression
- Reaction from two quarters: the public and a progressive faction within the army officer corps; culminating ultimately in a
- Coup d'état, led by progressive officers, that when successful led to
- Promulgation of various reforms
- Reemergence with the army of the most conservative faction, and
- Consolidation of that power once more.¹⁹

From December 1931 to January 1980, El Salvador underwent six iterations of the above pattern. Publicly, military leaders preferred elections to dictatorship. The electoral process, however, was a strictly controlled process.²⁰ After 1950, the ESAF held presidential elections but manipulated the results through the official party. From 1950 to 1961, the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification (PRUD) offered the official candidate. The National Conciliation Party (PCN) managed elections from 1961 to 1979. If the outcome seemed uncertain, election fraud proved a favorite tactic.²¹

In 1962, Colonel and President Julio Adalberto Rivera announced a major election reform. Having recently gained power and in the *promulgation of reforms* phase, Rivera wanted to distinguish his regime from his predecessor. The electoral process was expanded to include opposition parties. Additionally, Rivera established proportional representation in the National Assembly. The Parties' electoral strength would determine seat allocation. This action created great dismay among *The Fourteen*, who still feared the inspiration of another peasant revolt.²² Three opposition parties immediately announce their formation. A small amount of professionals and intellectuals formed the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR). The National Democratic Union (UDN) was a slightly expanded version of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS),

19. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 37-38.

20. Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41.

21. Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below*, 33.

22. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 53-54.

previously outlawed in 1932. The largest, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), drew members from local professionals.²³

After a small electoral showing in the 1964 elections, the PDC eclipsed all other opposition parties and by 1968 challenged the PCN for control of the National Assembly. As a progressive party, the PDC advocated social and economic reforms. Socially, the PDC aligned itself with the Catholic Church's progressive social doctrine and the international social democratic movement. Economically, the party emphasized a capitalist development model and denounced Communism.²⁴

Castro's Cuban revolution brought renewed American interest in Latin America. In 1963, President Kennedy stated at a meeting of Central American presidents, "Communism is the chief obstacle to economic development."²⁵ The United States established a presence in all Latin American nations to assist the anti-communist struggles. By 1963, the United States became actively involved in El Salvador. The initial project was to establish the Democratic Nationalist Organization (ORDEN). General Jose Alberto Medrano, a senior National Guard officer assigned to supervise ORDEN, claimed the organization "grew out of the State Department, the CIA, and the Green Berets during the time of Kennedy. We created these specialized agencies to fight the plans and action of international Communism. We organized ORDEN, ANSESAL [Salvadoran National Security Agency], and counterinsurgency courses, and we bought special arms – G3 automatic rifles – to detain the communist movement. We were preparing the team to stop communism."²⁶ ORDEN operated as an armed peasant vigilance association patrolling rural areas to combat communism. The effort was intended to reach all the villages of El Salvador. While the 1963 communist threat was of dubious existence, ORDEN's establishment coincided with an opening of the political process. The organization provided an extensive intelligence network and made the peasants partially responsible for their security. This information infusion helped the oligarchy maintain their power through coercion of the population.²⁷

23. Marvin E. Gettleman, Patrick Lacefield, Louis Menashe, and David Mermelstein, eds., *El Salvador: Central American in the New Cold War*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 54-55.

24. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 54.

25. Quoted in Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 54-55.

26. Quoted in Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 55.

27. North, *Bitter Grounds*, 71.

To conduct this coercion, every sizable National Guard garrison covertly formed death squads. These death squads were not random, uncontrolled groups. Instead, high-ranking Salvadoran officials seemed to control and guide their attacks, murders, and intimidations. While the United States' culpability remains unclear, individuals identified in ORDEN's intelligence reports later became victims of the death squads' violence.²⁸ By 1964, ORDEN's suspected connection to Salvadoran death squads' development began to draw public condemnation, including from the US Ambassador.²⁹

Election fraud had plagued El Salvador's political process since 1931. The 1972 election manipulation, however, triggered widespread disillusionment with the process. The very popular and successful mayor of San Salvador, Jose Napoleon Duarte, had united the Christian Democrats with the other opposition parties. Forming the National Opposition Union (UNO), the small leftist party, the MNR, and the communist front party, UDN, joined the PDC.³⁰ Duarte later recalled, "I did not like the alliance with the Communist, since our philosophies were totally opposed. I did not want to become president if there were even a chance, owing the Communists a place in the government."³¹ Other party leaders convinced Duarte that disunity was the greatest problem facing the opposition parties. As the largest party, the PDC could achieve a favorable position. On the assumption that he could not win, Duarte agreed to run. "By leading the opposition, I could inspire votes, adding to our proportion in the assembly even if I did not win the presidency....The alliance with the Communists was tolerable because I believed they had a right to representation in the assembly."³²

By all objective accounts, Duarte and Guillermo Ungo, his vice president candidate, won the 20 February 1972 election. The election board, however, announced the Army's PCN candidate as the winner. Salvadorans clearly recognized this election was fraudulent. Unwilling to endanger relations with the ESAF, President Nixon's administration remained silent. Washington also had misgivings about Duarte's Marxist

28. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 134-135.

29. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 56.

30. North, *Bitter Grounds*, 70-71.

31. Jose Napoleon Duarte and Diane Page, *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), 67-68.

32. Duarte and Page, *Duarte*, 68.

allies in the UNO.³³ With the precedent of *La Matanza* influencing his decision, Duarte attempted to calm the population's outrage. Instead of rioting, he encouraged the people to show their strength during the legislative elections occurring in two weeks. Duarte claimed, "But in 1972 bloodshed did not seem inevitable. I believed there were still ways to use the electoral process to eventually thwart the military rulers."³⁴ His prediction proved inaccurate.

On 12 March 1972, the PCN rigged the Assembly elections by disregarding electoral law. First, the government's Central Election Council declined to list UNO candidates on the ballots. In clear violation of regulations, authorities certified election results despite the number of marred ballots outnumbering the valid ones. The population's outcry resonated with several young military officers. On 25 March, the military again conducted a coup d'état. Despite its initial success, the National Guard violently regained control of San Salvador. During the conflict, Duarte issued a radio appeal for listeners to support the rebels. After the quelling the rebellion, the Salvadoran government promised to execute all involved in the recent coup attempt. Submitting to diplomatic pressure, the Salvadorans allowed the prominent plotters, including Duarte, to live in exile. Describing the logic behind the events, Stephen Webre noted that El Salvador's electoral reform encouraged an active opposition but forbade that opposition from coming to power.³⁵ Fraud plagued Salvadoran elections again in 1974, 1976, and 1977.³⁶

With no legal mechanism to influence government, the population turned toward armed rebellion. Throughout the 1970's, Marxist armed organizations swelled in quantity and members. The Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) split away from the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCES). Following Guevarist theories of revolution, the Cubanline People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) formed and developed close ties with similar organizations across Latin America. By 1975, the ERP split and spawned the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). The smallest group was the Trotskyite Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC). Despite their political

33. Krauss, *Inside Central America*, 67.

34. Duarte and Page, *Duarte*, 77.

35. Quoted in Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 64.

36. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 67 and 71-73.

nature, these organizations looked more like criminal gangs, than they did insurgent groups. Extortion, murder, and theft were common. High profile kidnappings generated large ransoms to finance the factions' supplies and operations. The groups' political fronts challenged the government through mass demonstrations and strikes. But without a coordinated strategy, the diverse groups individually escalated their activities throughout the 1970s.³⁷

In July 1979, the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua convinced the Salvadoran Marxists that Latin America was primed for revolution. In May 1980, the factions' leaders met in Havana and loosely united under a broad command umbrella, a precondition for Cuban aid. Later in the year, the PCES, FPL, ERP, FARN, and PRTC fully unified as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), with a political front group of Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). Armed by Cuba and Nicaragua, the FMLN attempted to copy the Sandinistas' model.³⁸

Just three months after the Sandinistas' victory, El Salvador experienced another coup. The El Salvadoran Marxists decided to attack the new government before it consolidated its strength.³⁹

Global Influences on the Salvadoran Insurgency. Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States relaxed during the 1970s. President Carter opined that, "It's a mistake for Americans to assume or to claim that every time an evolutionary change takes place in this hemisphere that somehow it's a result of secret, massive Cuban intervention."⁴⁰ During the 1980s, however, President Reagan revived the international friction and confrontation.⁴¹ Part of this new hard-line stance, the Reagan Administration confirmed its commitment to stop communist aggression. El Salvador served as an ideal testing ground to implement America's new low-intensity conflict

37. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 40-41.

38. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 41-42.

39. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 42.

40. Quoted in Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," in *El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War*, ed. Marvin E. Gettleman, Patrick Lacefield, Louis Menashe, and David Mermelstein, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 31.

41. Gettleman et al., *El Salvador: Central American in the New Cold War*, 8.

doctrine.⁴² Reagan's stance had its roots in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 as basis for resisting foreign incursions into Latin America. As Kennedy had during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Reagan interpreted communist incursion into El Salvadoran affairs to challenge a vital national interest.⁴³ Unlike Korea or Vietnam, the direct and continuous link to a communist exporter proved difficult to confirm although foreign advisors and material surely infiltrated El Salvador from Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Soviet Union. By 1981, though, Reagan's State Department in a White Paper charged that, "El Salvador has been progressively transformed into another case of indirect armed aggression against a Third World country by Communist powers acting through Cuba."⁴⁴

The Roman Catholic Church also had great influence in El Salvador. Prior to the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the church typically allied itself with wealth and power. In 1965, a drastic change in views occurred. Vatican II asserted that the church has interests beyond the spiritual realm and that all church members were equal by baptism. Three years later, Latin American bishops in Medellin denounced the traditional alliance of Church, military, and rich elites. Additionally, the Medellin gathering called upon the Church "to defend the rights of the oppressed; to promote grassroots organizations; to denounce the unjust actions of world powers that works against self-determination of weaker nations; in short, to make a preferential option for the poor."⁴⁵ Vatican II and the Medellin movement encouraged a greater activism among the clergy, which eventually led to clashes with the government. Additionally, the peasants gained encouragement that freedom or liberation struggles might be achieved during one's lifetime, with God's blessing.⁴⁶

As an agricultural exporter, El Salvador's economy fluctuates with the global market. As price takers in the global market, the Salvadoran coffee industry heavily depended on maintaining low labor costs. The adverse effects of lean times passed

42. Benjamin C. Schwartz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine in El Salvador: The Frustration of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building*, RAND Report R-4042-USDP (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), 1-2.

43. Lieutenant Colonel James F. Glynn, "El Salvador, Iraq, and Strategic Considerations for Counterinsurgency" (Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, 2008), 5.

44. United States Department of State, "Communist Interference in El Salvador: The US State Department White Paper" in *El Salvador: Central American in the New Cold War*, 315.

45. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 83.

46. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 84-86.

directly to the peasants. Wages fell, while unemployment rose. Without communal land to farm, the landless often turned to crime to support their families. The government, more specifically the oligarchy, did little to mitigate the vulnerability of relying on a single export. Events like the Great Depression and World War II significantly reduced the price of coffee and created labor unrest. When economic diversification did occur, the chosen industries also required low labor costs. Although not to coffee's extreme, the textile industry and other small manufacturing firms exploited their employees. Frequently, the coffee barons owned or controlled the new sectors. In 1979, of the top twenty family groups controlling the nonagricultural business, only four did not have similar positions in the agro-export sector.⁴⁷

Regional Influences. The Central American isthmus consists of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica. Costa Rica proves the exception of the group. Unlike its neighbors, Costa Rica has avoided wars with guerrillas backed by Castro's Cuba, prevented repressive dictatorships, sustained a strong democracy, cultivated a stable economy, and achieved relatively equitable landholding.⁴⁸ El Salvador has sustained warm relations with Costa Rica and Guatemala. El Salvador had only one lingering dispute with Honduras. El Salvador contended Honduran security forces did little to stop the FMLN from using cross-border Salvadoran refugee camps as guerrilla sanctuaries.⁴⁹

The FMLN maintained an extremely close relationship with their Nicaraguan comrades, the Sandinistas. Publicly backed by the Cubans and Soviets, the Sandinistas challenged the pro-US dictatorship in Nicaragua.⁵⁰ Throughout the 1970's the Salvadoran guerrillas donated over \$10 million to the Sandinistas.⁵¹ After a long, bloody campaign, the Sandinistas finally control of Nicaragua on 17 July 1979. The FMLN celebrated the victory as proof that a determined population could overthrow a dictatorship.⁵² Political, social, and historical contextual parallels in Cuba and Nicaragua

47. Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below*, 34-39.

48. Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battles for Latin America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 26 & 34.

49. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 46.

50. Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," 18.

51. Krauss, *Inside Central America*, 68.

52. Harald Jung, "Class Struggle and Civil War in El Salvador," in *El Salvador*, 81.

allowed similar revolutionary models, but contextual differences existed in El Salvador. After their victory, the Sandinistas funneled Cuban financial and military aid to the FMLN.⁵³

Fidel Castro's Cuba had significant influence throughout Latin America. By "exporting the revolution," Castro defended it on his island. Cuba trained, armed, financed, and advised insurgent movements across Latin America. After the revolution, Cuba's sudden but increasing loyalty toward the Soviet Union allowed the Soviet leadership to elevate South America in priority. Cuba became a distribution center for Soviet aid. Many external factors influencing the Salvadoran FMLN can be traced back to Cuba.⁵⁴

American Domestic Influences. Several events combined to humiliate the United States during the Carter administration. Iran fell from the American sphere of influence and became a hostile Islamic fundamentalist state. Exacerbating the disgrace, the American Embassy staff suffered as hostages for over a year and an attempted rescue operation turned into an internationally visible fiasco. The Panama Canal, a historical American power symbol, reverted to Panama's control in 1978. The Sandinistas' victory further eroded America's influence in Central America and enlarged communist influence. In El Salvador, the pro-American government faltered as a Marxist insurgency increased its influence. Furthermore, the unpleasant experience of Vietnam continued to plague the United States. To regain lost prestige and begin to restore the country's former influence, President Reagan chose El Salvador to be his Central American main effort.⁵⁵ In a televised address, Reagan proclaimed, "Central America is a region of great importance to the United States. And it is so close – San Salvador is closer to Houston, Texas, than Houston is to Washington, D.C. Central American is America; its at our doorstep. And it has become the stage for a bold attempt by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua to install Communism by force throughout the hemisphere....What we see in

53. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrilla and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 279-281.

54. Reid, *Forgotten Continent*, 99-101.

55. Gettleman et al., *El Salvador: Central American in the New Cold War*, 10-11.

El Salvador is an attempt to destabilize the entire region and eventually move chaos and anarchy toward the American border.”⁵⁶

President Reagan conducted a deliberate public relations campaign to win American support for intervention in El Salvador. His policy advocated supporting the Salvadoran government with military intervention, short of combat troops. The domestic opposition included a solidarity movement similar to the anti-Vietnam War campaign; several key Congressional leaders; and numerous influential members of the media. While the opposition never integrated, President Reagan presented numerous arguments united under the Red Menace theme. The American Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, claimed that tyrannies of the right were preferable and less risky to totalitarianism of the left. Secretary of State Alexander Haig highlighted fears of the Soviet’s Latin American influence through the White Paper, “Communist Interference in El Salvador.” A bi-partisan commission chaired by Henry Kissinger offered moderate policy proposals between the extremes of Vietnam-like military intervention and complete disengagement. In other words, it echoed Reagan’s approach. While a debate over El Salvador continued throughout the American involvement, Presided Reagan sustained sufficient congressional support to maintain adequate funding.⁵⁷

Galula’s Model Applied to Salvadoran Insurgency

A Cause. The FMLN desired to end the abuse and repression under the successive regimes of the oligarchy-controlled government. The government’s repetitive promises to allow those who had been long repressed a voice in government never materialized.⁵⁸ The resulting protests and uprisings brought more governmental repression, which generated more strikes and riots. The cycle escalated. The FMLN’s Marxist wing called for a fundamental transformation of El Salvador’s society. The FMLN viewed economic reform, social justice, and free elections critical to bring equity to Salvadoran society. Any solution not complying with the Marxist revolution was

56. Ronald Reagan, “U.S. Interests in Central America” in *El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War*, 12.

57. Gentleman et al., *El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War*, 309-313.

58. Max G. Manwaring and Court Prisk, *A Strategic View of Insurgencies: Insights from El Salvador*, McNair Papers no. 8 (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, May 1990), 3-4.

unacceptable. With their patience for gradual evolution exhausted, the FMLN sought change through violent revolution.⁵⁹

Counterinsurgent Vulnerability. El Salvador's government lacked legitimacy. The military and oligarchy fostered a regime strong enough to protect their interests and control the elements agitating for change. When repression failed to maintain order, the government fell to a coup. The new regime started anew to serve the military and oligarchy, while its rhetoric catered to the populace's grievances.⁶⁰ To solve the problem, the government preferred repression to relinquishing its power. Duarte recognized this weakness, "The development of a relatively honest and competent government interested in the welfare of the people – what you call legitimacy – was indeed critical to Salvadoran stability and security."⁶¹

El Salvador's international image suffered from accusations of continued human rights violation. Death squad activity remained a media focus throughout the insurgency. The FMLN propaganda ensured the government was charged for every attack.⁶² Duarte noted this weakness, "If there had been some structure to handle the press, some capacity to investigate charges and demonstrate what was true and false, we might have done better."⁶³

The government also suffered an economic crisis in the mid-1980s. The conflict aggravated the already depressed agricultural and industrial sectors. Unemployment soared from single digits to 33 percent by 1985. The laborers suffered a one-third wage reduction from 1983-1987. The lack of resources bound the counterinsurgency efforts to the American aid.⁶⁴

In the United States, the continued assistance remained uncertain. Congressional leaders held extensive debates over funding for El Salvador. The policymakers proved extremely sensitive to the media's portrayal of events in El Salvador. Alleged human rights violations created a significant hindrance to procuring long-term funding

59. Kimbra L. Fishel and Edwin G. Corr, "UN Peace Operations in El Salvador: The Manwaring Paradigm in a Traditional Setting" in *"The Savage Wars of Peace: Toward a New Paradigm of Peace Operations*, ed. John T. Fishel (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 42-43.

60. Manwaring and Prisk, *Insights from El Salvador*, 1.

61. Quoted in Manwaring and Prisk, *Insights from El Salvador*, 5.

62. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 46.

63. Quoted in Manwaring and Prisk, *Insights from El Salvador*, 7.

64. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 46.

guarantees.⁶⁵ America's El Salvador strategy lacked any long-term coherence. Unsure of future funding, the United States always pursued short-term gains and quick fixes. Lacking a coherent strategy to frame discussions, legislators debated appropriate military and economic aid levels without considering long-term goal achievement.⁶⁶ Military planners would have preferred to have less money or supplies provided on a more consistent basis. Without the consistency, American armed forces failed to plan for the long term.⁶⁷



Figure 4 El Salvador

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *El Salvador*, 1980, "Perry-Castañeda Map Collection – UT Library Online," <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/elsalvador.jpg> (accessed 22 May 2009).

65. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 46.

66. Manwaring and Prisk, *Insights from El Salvador*, 8.

67. Dr. Max G. Manwaring and Mr. Courtney Prisk, *Strategic Assessment: El Salvador*, Final Report (Fort Lewis, WA: BDM Management Services, 4 February 1988), 16.

Favorable Geography. With the highest population density of the Latin American countries, El Salvador has five to six million people living in a territory about the size of Massachusetts; roughly, 600 per square mile. Almost the entire isthmus is undulating mountains with a line of extinct volcanoes. The high peaks made it ideally suited for growing coffee.⁶⁸ Only aerial reconnaissance can systematically monitor guerrilla activity throughout the mountains, coastal brush, and jungle. Maneuvering large conventional units through the terrain proved extremely difficult. Initially, this favored the FMLN guerrillas' small-unit tactics.⁶⁹

El Salvador's border with Honduras was porous. The Honduran Salvadoran refugee camps became safe havens for the FMLN. The rugged Guazapa and San Vincente volcanoes provided shelter for Salvadoran guerrilla base camps. The Gulf of Fonseca fostered maritime infiltration via small boats, fishing vessels, and planes. The Salvadoran seacoast was marred by multiple inlets with gradual beaches.⁷⁰

Geography and demographics favored establishing guerilla strongholds near major cities and critical infrastructure facilities. The inaccessible mountains provided secure bases and logistics routes. The insurgents could gather near these safe havens and conceal their approach to the cities. Achieving surprise, the guerrillas could rapidly enter the urban areas and overwhelm the security forces. After these operations, the close proximity of the bases helped the FMLN retreat, reconstitute, and prepare for their next incursion.⁷¹

Outside Support. At the start of the insurgency, the arms pipeline through Nicaragua sustained the FMLN. Cuba served as the Latin America distributor of the Soviet Union's and its allies' aid. For example, before a major operation in January 1981, tons of American-made weapons from captured stockpiles in Vietnam covertly arrived in Salvadoran guerrilla base camps. Later in the war, Soviet bloc weapons began arriving in El Salvador. Providing Western-made weapons encouraged capturing ammunition and provided a level deniability.⁷² Fearing Reagan's reaction, the Soviets

68. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 23, and Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 75-76.

69. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 93.

70. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 43 & 46.

71. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 93-94, and Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 43 & 46.

72. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 43.

refused a FMLN request for Surface to Air missiles to combat the American-supplied helicopter and airplanes. This left El Salvador's airpower unchallenged throughout the struggle.⁷³ After 1989, international support dwindled. The collapse of the Soviet Union ended its ability to support communist insurgencies across the globe. Without their own Soviet aid, Cuba and Nicaragua severely reduced their commitments in El Salvador. The American embargo and support for Nicaragua's Contra insurgency further degraded its external support.⁷⁴

American Goals for Troop Commitment

Determined to distance himself from President Carter's perceived weakness in the international arena, President Reagan refused to permit a loss in Central America. El Salvador seemed ideal for reasserting American influence in Latin America and challenging communist aggression. Unlike Vietnam and Iran, El Salvador was much closer geographically and within America's traditional influence sphere. A policy of military assistance, including advisors, seemed acceptable to El Salvador, Congress, the American people, and the media. Vietnam's specter should not reemerge in El Salvador. By keeping the intervention small and the objectives limited, the United States did not prohibit disengagement through negotiation, compromise, or diplomacy.⁷⁵

The *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, more well-known as the *Kissinger Report*, outlined American interests in the Latin American region. As the commission's chairperson, Henry Kissinger, stated the objective was to provide a bipartisan framework for future strategy. Critics view the document's recommendations as a ploy to justify Reagan's current actions, but the report highlights the interests underlying the desire to increase involvement. Unlike previous dilemma's in statecraft, the Commission found American strategic and moral interests coincided. The report defines the moral interests included:

- To preserve the moral authority of the United States. To be perceived by others as a nation that does what is right *because* it is right is one of the country's principal assets.

73. Krauss, *Inside Central America*, 98.

74. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980-1992)," 44.

75. Gettleman et al., *El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War*, 309-313.

- To improve the living conditions of the people of Central America. They are neighbors. Their human need is tinder waiting to be ignited. And if it is, the conflagration could threaten the entire hemisphere.
- To advance the cause of democracy, broadly defined, within the hemisphere.
- To strengthen the hemispheric system by strengthening what is now, in both economic and social terms, one of its weakest links.
- To promote peaceful change in Central America while resisting the violation of democracy by force and terrorism.
- To prevent hostile forces from seizing and expanding control in a strategically vital area of the Western Hemisphere.
- To bar the Soviet Union from consolidating either directly or through Cuba a hostile foothold on the American continents in order to advance its strategic purposes.⁷⁶

In terms of direct national security interests, the Commission advocated preventing:

- A series of developments which might require us to devote large resources to defend the southern approaches to the United States, thus reducing our capacity to defend our interests elsewhere.
- A potentially serious threat to our shipping lanes through the Caribbean.
- A proliferation of Marxist-Leninist states that would increase violence, dislocation, and political repression in the region.
- The erosion of our power to influence events worldwide that would flow from the perception that we were unable to influence vital events close to home.⁷⁷

After an eloquent argument, the commission's report recommended, "The United States should make a maximum effort to help El Salvador to create a self-sustaining society dedicated to open participation in its political process, to social justice, and to economic freedom, growth, and development. An El Salvador that works toward these goals deserves our continuing support. This should include adequate levels of economic and military aid, which in turn can produce pressure for a politically negotiated end to the fighting."⁷⁸ Deane Hinton, US Ambassador to El Salvador 1982-1983, believed her

76. Henry Kissinger et al., "The White House Searches for a Consensus: The Kissinger Report" in *Central America in the New Cold War*, 337.

77. Henry Kissinger et al., "The Kissinger Report," 338.

78. Henry Kissinger et al., "The Kissinger Report," 349-350.

mission was simply “to make sure that the guerrillas and Communists didn’t take over El Salvador.”⁷⁹

Situation after American Troop Commitment

The 15 October 1979 coup installed the first military-civilian junta. The new government intended to remove influence from *The Fourteen* by including moderate and leftist representatives. Had the coup occurred a year earlier, it might have diffused the insurgency’s growth. Instead, the communists were by then fully committed to armed rebellion. El Salvador’s progression toward civil war grew extremely bloody. The FMLN began its campaign by seizing businesses, governmental buildings, and churches. Several massive demonstrations effectively closed San Salvador. The government responded by further repressing the general population. Attempting to target the insurgency’s leaders, state-linked death squad killings reached nearly 2,000 a month. Accounts differ on the sniper’s allegiance that killed the extremely popular Catholic Archbishop, Oscar Romero, while the priest was conducting mass. At Romero’s funeral, gunmen fired shots into the crowd and several died in the ensuing panic. Ambushes, bombings, large detainment, and sniping were also common.⁸⁰

The military junta tottered as the insurgency became ascendant. Duarte’s Christian Democratic Party (PDC) united with the government after several members split to join the communists. The government’s and PDC’s tenuous alliance tried to implement reforms while the violence continued escalating.⁸¹ Describing these worst of times, Duarte recalls, “My personal desire was to stay out of the junta. Until this moment, all the difficulties with armed forces, all the killings, were not mine to resolve. By becoming a junta member, I would have to accept that the violence would be my responsibility. I wanted my legacy to be democracy, not deaths.”⁸²

In the summer of 1979, the United States entered into a struggle completely unfamiliar to its secure and tolerant society.⁸³ Carter’s initial commitment consisted of

79. Max G. Manwaring and Court Prisk, eds., *El Salvador at War: An Oral History of Conflict from the 1979 Insurrection to the Present* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), 111.

80. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 78-80.

81. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 79.

82. Duarte and Page, *Duarte: My Story*, 115.

83. Schwartz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 67.

six Green Berets and \$300,000 in military aid.⁸⁴ Creating Duarte's democracy in such a world presented a Herculean challenge. America's initial strategy united reforming societal and economic practices; expanding and improving the military; and transitioning to democracy.⁸⁵

After two unsuccessful coup attempts, the government began a major shuffling of positions. In December 1980, Jose Napoleon Duarte became Provisional President of the junta; and several PDC members occupied key positions. The concept of civilian control of the military began to emerge in El Salvador. Washington heralded the change. It helped justify American support for a moderate, reformist, civilian/military government. Duarte later commented on his position's precariousness, "The only reason I am in this position is because I have the support of the army."⁸⁶

The first challenge of Duarte's presidency occurred after the murder of four nuns. President Carter suspended the balance of \$5.7 million of non-military aid after determining the perpetrators were Salvadoran National Guardsmen. The suspension lasted until three days before President Reagan's inauguration.⁸⁷ The lifting of the suspension coincided with the arrival of twenty American military trainers authorized by President Carter in December 1980.⁸⁸

President Reagan's administration rapidly increased military aid. By late March 1981, Reagan authorized over \$25 million in military credits and 56 non-combat military advisers. The adviser increase did not include the military staff of the Embassy in San Salvador, which also had its numbers increased. As the situation developed into a stalemate, American officials considered committing troops to bolster El Salvador's security forces.⁸⁹

As the United States increased its military presence, the new counterinsurgency doctrine, low-intensity conflict, guided the operations. After Vietnam, the American military revised its approach to small wars. The adviser's guiding philosophy was

84. Krauss, *Inside Central America*, 71.

85. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 127-128.

86. Quoted in Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 145.

87. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 146.

88. North, *Bitter Grounds*, 90.

89. North, *Bitter Grounds*, 90-91.

“KISSSS – ‘Keep it Simple, Sustainable, Small, and Salvadoran.’”⁹⁰ Colonel John Waghelstein, head of the U.S. Military Group (the advisers), described his strategy “as revolutionary and counterrevolutionary warfare...that uses all of the weapons of total war, including political, economic, and psychological warfare with the military aspects being a distant fourth in many cases.”⁹¹

In January 1981, the FMLN launched its Final Offensive to defeat the Salvadoran military and overthrow the government. The timing was intended to preempt the American aid and present President Reagan with an irreversible situation in El Salvador. In over 500 separate actions, the FMLN partially occupied 82 cities and attacked 81 military posts or garrisons. The government successfully reversed these gains in a few days. Two major miscalculations significantly contributed to the operations’ failure. The citizens did not rally around the FMLN guerrillas occupying the cities; instead, they sought the protection of their homes. Many remained sequestered until the fighting subsided and emerged only to see which side won. The other failed assumption occurred when the soldiers and officers of key barracks did not join the rebellion. For the FMLN, the Final Offensive was a military disaster. The FMLN salvaged its will to fight, changed tactics, and began a protracted guerilla war. The FMLN, however, would never regain its former political influence.⁹²

Although the Salvadoran government prevailed against this major assault, the FMLN did not disappear. Its fighters retreated to the mountains and left the cities in the government’s control. The government’s security operations destroyed the remnants of the urban movement. The FMLN conducted training in Nicaragua and Cuba and the arms shipments continued to rebuild combat strength. From its safe havens, the FMLN strategy resembled the Vietnamese model.⁹³

From 1981 to 1985, the outcome of El Salvador’s civil war remained in doubt. The FMLN launched major incursions into governmental controlled areas, but none had permanence. The ESAF suffered heavy losses during the attacks but never collapsed. The government’s offensive operations could assume temporary dominance of the

90. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 148.

91. Quoted in Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 148.

92. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 90-92.

93. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 93-94.

FMLN's strong support area, but they could not afford to garrison all the towns or villages. As the ESAF retreated, the FMLN filled the void. By 1983, the American security assistance began to produce results.⁹⁴

In the political arena, the Americans pushed for elections in 1982. Transitioning to democracy helped demonstrate the government's legitimacy and long-term commitment to giving the people a governmental voice. Additionally, elections helped the American Congress justify its commitment to supporting El Salvador. A new party emerged in El Salvador to challenge the PDC and army's control. The Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) formed around Robert D'Aubuisson's charismatic leadership and the causes of nationalism, anticommunism, and a free market. Its key message was a militaristic promise to restore order. Referring to the 1932 Matanza, ARENA promised to eliminate communist terrorists and maintain the close government-military alliance. Most prominent ARENA members had close connections to the death squads and ORDEN.⁹⁵

While the elections bolstered the counterinsurgency campaign, the results posed a great threat. With 40 percent of the vote, the PDC gained a plurality in the legislative assembly but could not form a controlling majority. ARENA earned 30 percent but allied with the third place party, PCN, to gain a majority. Fearing the loss of a functioning civilian government, the American government intervened to prevent D'Aubuisson from achieving the national presidency. Instead, under heavy pressure, the Assembly named a public nonentity, Alvaro Magana, president; but D'Aubuisson was appointed President of the Assembly. D'Aubuisson's ARENA was able to stop many reforms proposed by Duarte's PDC. After intense negotiations and bargaining, a new Salvadoran constitution emerged, and the Assembly announced a national presidential election on 25 March 1984.⁹⁶

The 1984 Presidential elections were a closely contested affair. Duarte defeated D'Aubuisson with 53.6 percent of the vote. Duarte later noted, "D'Aubuisson is not the

94. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 94-95.

95. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 155-158, and Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 105-106.

96. Mongomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 160-164 & 178, and Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 107.

type of man to tolerate being beaten fairly.”⁹⁷ After investigating numerous claims of fraud and interference, the Central Election Council officially pronounced Duarte the winner. Duarte felt vindicated, “I had been elected president by the people of El Salvador despite, or because of, all that had happened in the past – the stolen election, seven years in exile, my role as a junta member and figurehead president in the bloodiest times.”⁹⁸ Duarte now had to fulfill his campaign promise to be a peacemaker. “My first year as president would be spent building the right conditions for peace talks. Before we talked to the guerrillas, the human rights abuses had to be brought under control. The economic situation had to improve. Our political power must be consolidated, and a better international image created. Public opinion had to form behind such a dialogue.”⁹⁹

On the battlefield, American assistance began to improve the ESAF. Advisors produced new counterinsurgency units skilled in the hearts-and-minds approach. The units stood in sharp contrast with the death squads still plaguing the countryside. The ESAF enjoyed new American weapons that finally matched the technology imported by the FMLN. The biggest benefit came from an increase in airpower. Air mobility allowed the ESAF to move rapidly across El Salvador’s mountains. The American UH-1H Huey complemented the A-37 strike aircraft. Fearing the ESAF’s improved airpower, the guerrillas operated in smaller units and could not conduct attacks similar to the Final Offensive. Aerial reconnaissance greatly improved the ESAF’s ability to track guerrilla activities. From July 1983 to February 1984, El Salvador’s aircraft use increased by over 220 hours per month. The aerial attacks generated claims of indiscriminate bombings, but the Reagan administration joined the ESAF in dismissing the claims as FMLN propaganda.¹⁰⁰

From 1984 through 1989, the FMLN’s ability to challenge the ESAF waned. During the same period, the ESAF grew in size and capability; and the government enjoyed increased popular support. The FMLN remained a strong guerrilla force, but the popular support had not expanded beyond its initial members. Only the external support from Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet Union allowed the FMLN to continue its

97. Duarte and Page, *Duarte: My Story*, 201.

98. Duarte and Page, *Duarte: My Story*, 200.

99. Duarte and Page, *Duarte: My Story*, 209.

100. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 173, and Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 95.

campaign. Its strategic goals remained to seize power from the government, reduce the US Congress's willingness to support El Salvador, and expose the recent democratic transitions as more unfulfilled promises. Despite the populace's support for the elections, the FMLN refused to negotiate with the government or to participate in the democratic process. Instead, they demanded a power-sharing relationship based on a correlation of forces. Tying political negotiations to military force levels left the FMLN on weak footing.¹⁰¹

A general stalemate developed by 1989. Neither side had achieved a decisive victory. An end seemed doubtful for the near future. By mid-year, initial meetings between the FMLN and the government appeared unproductive. Two events created fresh impetus for a negotiated settlement. In November, the FMLN launched the second Final Offensive. The guerrillas made no lasting gains in territory but did have lengthy engagement in San Salvador's wealthy neighborhoods. Doubting the ability of the ESAF to end the violence, influential members of society pressured the government to reinvigorate negotiations. Internationally, the Cold War's end threatened the economic and military assistance for both sides. The Soviet Union's withdrawal of support greatly constrained the FMLN. Without increased Salvadoran support, the FMLN could not survive solely on the reduced aid from Nicaragua and Cuba. El Salvador's government felt renewed pressure to negotiate a peace settlement. America's new president, George H.W. Bush, made American aid conditional on a settlement. Additionally, Spain, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela requested United Nations assistance to negotiate a settlement.¹⁰²

In March 1990, the two sides began to negotiations under UN mediation. Setting conditions for future discussions, both sides announced a partial ceasefire and agreed to three guiding principles. First, the basis of the conflict was political not ideological. Second, El Salvador's democratization remained the primary goal. Third, negotiations would continue until complete.¹⁰³ The meetings continued with diplomatic wrangling over demands and concessions. Finally, in January 1992, the Chapultepec Peace Accords

101. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 96-97.

102. Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), 69-70.

103. Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 153-154.

ended El Salvador's civil war. Both sides agreed to resolve future issues through El Salvador's democratic political processes. The FMLN agreed to a democratic political regime with a capitalist economy. The Salvadoran government granted FMLN legal political participation and several socioeconomic reforms. Over the next few years, the agreement's implementation allowed combatants to return to civilian life and ended the endemic terror of political violence.¹⁰⁴

Decision to Disengage

Given the American goal accomplishment, the disengagement decision required little debate. While maintaining pressure on the Salvadoran government to negotiate, the United States never abandoned them. American support did not dramatically change immediately before or after the peace accords. Changing a long-standing policy, the American government agreed to meet with FMLN leaders and to discuss individual issues. Working with the president, Congress's aid legislation incorporated incentives and disincentives for progress in the peace negotiations and the implementation. As it had spread, the US military assistance reduced at a gradual rate. The ESAF smoothly adjusted to complete independence. Despite having accomplished its goal, the United States remained committed to the peace process. American military advisers remained in the country to train and assist the ESAF to comply with the peace accords. The commitment continued years after establishing peace. In 1996, the American government provided \$10 million for El Salvador's land transfer program.¹⁰⁵

Long-term Outcomes after Withdrawal

While still democratic, El Salvador's peace remains precarious. Social, political, and economic pressures continue to threaten their development and democratization. Security issues focus more on gang crime and drug shipments than an insurgency. Economically, El Salvador debates the ratification of the Central American Free Trade Area. The United States remains keenly interested in El Salvador's progress. El

104. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, 70-74.

105. Fishel and Corr, "UN Peacekeeping Operations in El Salvador," 48-53, and Jones and Libicki, "How Terrorist Groups End," 76.

Salvador remains a staunch American ally, exhibited by being the only Latin America nation to join the 2003 Iraq coalition.¹⁰⁶

Insights

Stay Out of the Headlines. Starting a war in a democracy requires a public debate or justification. Very few counterinsurgency support missions involve national survival or vital interests. This means that public support will not be automatic or unanimous. Max Boot contends that it is possible to fight “wars without significant popular support.”¹⁰⁷ The collapsing of public support, however, has defeated a strong power facing a weaker opponent. Vietnam and Aden are two examples. President Carter, and then Reagan, faced Congressional and public scrutiny over supporting El Salvador. Most often, the outcries followed human rights violations, governmental repression, or high casualty events. Throughout the 1980’s, such events occurred less frequently, and the dedicated news coverage decreased steadily. The American public and media became distracted with other interests. Distraction proves less likely when the counterinsurgency has high money or casualty costs. These items prove “news worthy.” Risk avoidance operations, however, offer little chance for big successes. Like many other planning factors, national leaders have to find the correct balance.¹⁰⁸

Limit the Number of Advisers. More is not always better – the limited number of advisers had several advantages. The statute limit of fifty-five advisers prevented the Americans from assuming the primary role. Instead, El Salvador retained full responsibility and did not have a ready scapegoat. Democratic reform trumped military operations. Additionally, the Salvadorans paid the sacrifices for their long-term gains. Every civil project had an “El Salvador face” on it. Maintaining a low profile also reduced the accusations of colonialism and helped sustain international support. America’s limited numbers denied the insurgents a massed target. Congressional leaders were less likely experience angst over the smaller commitment. The lack of military options forced American leaders to consider the other national power elements’ benefits.

106. Fishel and Corr, “UN Peacekeeping Operations in El Salvador,” 54-55, and Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 160.

107. Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 304.

108. Major Erik Claessen, Belgain Armed Forces, “Discouraging Hearts and Minds: Democracies and Insurgencies,” *Military Review*, May-June 2007, 102.

Finally, ending America's commitment becomes an easier decision. Sunk costs, logistical requirements, and security voids created would all be less. American withdrawal would be less of a significant event for the host nation.¹⁰⁹

Sustain the Domestic Support. A list of America's great oratorical presidents has to include Ronald Reagan. Using his special talent, he led a public relations campaign to generate strong support for his El Salvador policies. He often provoked opposition, but he never shied from the opportunity to explain his worldview or American policy. El Salvador nested inside his views of the growing communist threat. President Reagan deliberately wanted to prevent a loss of public support like the Vietnam War. His well-developed communication skills proved influential to America's sustained commitment.

Building Government and Fighting. The United States executed a political-military strategy in El Salvador. The train and equip program provided the government with a viable counter to the FMLN. With only 55 men, the United States had to build up Salvadoran security forces to support the political efforts. While fighting an organized insurgency, the American officials ensured El Salvador's government transformed simultaneously. This allowed the government effectively to address the grievances of the population and promised elections. The United States refused to separate the two critical aspects. Democratic reform never became secondary to security operations. This sustained a population focus. By keeping them connected, El Salvador proved well prepared for the peace accords and the American withdrawal.¹¹⁰

Insights for Withdrawal. Withdrawal from El Salvador was relatively straightforward. The Reagan administration kept America's involvement small and forced the Salvadorans to prepare for an American departure absence. The United States found, nurtured, and developed competent indigenous political leaders without creating a dependence on American presence. The loss of American financial aid, however, would have long-term consequences. El Salvador could not have combated the FMLN and its Communist suppliers. Economic support, however, has a much easier approval process than the long-term troop commitment. The United States also remained a significant

109. Claessen, "Discouraging Hearts and Minds," 103, and Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 156 & 161.

110. Rabasa, "El Salvador (1980- 1992), 47.

Salvadoran partner after the peace accords. For many Americans, El Salvador's success eased the stigma of Vietnam.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications for American Disengagement from Afghanistan

The evidence here presented suggests that a country withdrawing from a counterinsurgency on foreign soil can make decisions that will foster a successful disengagement. This chapter first summarizes the insights emerging from the historical analysis. Then, after briefly describing Afghanistan's contemporary situation, it outlines several guidelines based on these insights.

Historical Insights

The first, and most obvious, insight is that a successful withdrawal required a successful counterinsurgency campaign. Winning the war was necessary, though not sufficient, to explain the productive disengagements from Malaya and El Salvador. By 1959, the MCP could not effectively operate militarily in Malaya; and in El Salvador, the FMLN reached the same condition by late 1989. Adhering to Mao's protracted war theory, insurgencies in these two countries could have reverted to an earlier phase to consolidate and regenerate their forces; but the governments' comprehensive counterinsurgency campaigns had already won the allegiance of popular majorities. Without popular support, the insurgencies could not stand up to the actions of the government's security forces. This weakness forced insurgent leaders either to abandon their causes or to pursue change through the legitimate political system. In both Aden and Vietnam, the insurgencies sustained their popular support and recovered from military defeats. Thus, shortly after Britain and the United States withdrew, the NLF and the Viet Cong/NVA emerged triumphant.

Effective withdrawals from counterinsurgencies also required the expectation of the indigenous nation's eventual independence or autonomy. In both Malaya and El Salvador, the expectation of independence and autonomy directly countered one of the insurgencies' primary grievances and attracted long-term popular commitment to the government's side. From the supporting nation's perspective, this mindset inhibited advisors from assuming an overly direct role and from neglecting to build the host nation's capability. Understanding the commitment's temporary nature, soldiers and civilians worked hand-in-hand to develop an internal capacity to confront threats. In both

Aden and Vietnam, the host nations relied too heavily on the supporting nation. Withdrawal of support left their governments incapable of independently confronting threats. Despite Aden's sudden independence, the citizens found other alternatives more attractive than the perceived puppet regime of the British. In Vietnam, the Viet Cong recovered sufficient strength by 1975 to provide material assistance to the conventional PAVN attack that felled the Saigon government.

Successful counterinsurgency campaigns effectively merged political and military efforts. Long-term success requires the political effort to woo the population, but it fails without security from insurgent reprisals. Enduring security gains provide protection, but they will fail without political efforts to entice popular collaboration. This interactive phenomenon requires the counterinsurgent to develop both capabilities simultaneously. The American advisors focused on building Vietnam's armed forces but neglected governmental legitimacy. In Aden, the British established the Federation's government but failed to build credible indigenous security forces. In both these failures, overly favoring one element negated the other's long-term benefits. Nearly simultaneous military and political development contributed to the successes in both Malaya and El Salvador. Developments in one aspect magnified the benefits concurrently created in the other. These improvements created a beneficial spiral as sound governance helped establish security and security help establish legitimacy.

When challenged by an insurgency, establishing effective government required strong political leadership. Preferably, an indigenous official assumes the role, but the sponsoring power can partially compensate for the vacancy. Despite numerous setbacks, Jose Napoleon Duarte rallied El Salvador's electorate and government against the FMLN. In Malaya, Sir Gerald Templer, and later Tunku Abdul Rahman, inspired the population to reject the MCP. During both wars, the insurgency targeted these leaders but failed to keep them from rallying support. These strong personalities differed dramatically from Ngo Dinh Diem's dubious leadership in Vietnam. Even the Americans doubted his ability to lead the country. After Diem's ouster, the Vietnamese cycled through several governmental leaders, but the Viet Cong steadily grew stronger. In Aden, no one personality assumed the leadership role. Without strong governmental leadership, the insurgents had a great opportunity to gain popular support.

The most glaring error that produced both unsuccessful counterinsurgencies and unsuccessful withdrawals was a misguided attempt by the sponsoring country to create indigenous country's military force in its own image. The American advisors in Vietnam created the ARVN to fight Korean-style conflicts with little regard for the growing insurgent threat. South Vietnam never developed its own capabilities to replicate the American firepower necessary for their adopted tactics. In Aden, the host nation never had the airplanes to gain benefit from the British models. This contrasts with the Malayans and Salvadorans. These countries created forces and adopted tactics suitable to their indigenous capabilities. Augmentation from sponsoring countries only assisted these forces. Advisors sought to improve existing capabilities to meet the present challenges without long-term reliance on foreign support.

Another failure involved poorly timing the announcement of the political decision to disengage from the struggling country. Without a legitimate replacement, the British proclaimed their intentions to disengage completely from Aden. The proclamation fueled more violence as groups fought to claim primacy because the weak Federal government could not stand without the British support. Additionally, the insurgents desired to validate the perception of vanquishing the British from Aden. Although quite not as precipitous, the South Vietnamese experienced a similar fate when the United States denied military support. In Malaya, the independence announcement bolstered the government's existing legitimacy. CTs began to defect in large numbers to the government's side. Given the nature of American assistance, the autonomy of El Salvador never seemed to be in doubt. The American announcement to end military assistance appeared almost immaterial. The critical factors for success in timing the announcement of disengagement appear to be the existence of a legitimate political authority and sufficient security to withstand insurgent threats.

This historical examination demonstrates that nations have successfully disengaged from confronting insurgencies on foreign soil. Success required a significant reduction of the insurgents' military capability. The indigenous government developed or maintained its autonomy and independence from the supporting nation. The merger of political and military efforts created the reciprocating benefits of sound governance and enduring security. A strong political leader amplified these developments and further

reduced the insurgency's attractiveness. Host nations developed organic capabilities, while advisors avoided the pitfall of mirror imaging. When the indigenous government established its self-sufficiency and legitimacy, the supporting nation announced its withdrawal without further empowering the insurgency. These insights are transferable to the current Afghanistan situation.

The Current Situation in Afghanistan

While American and Iraqi political leaders have determined a policy of gradually ending US involvement in Iraq, the potential American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan remains less certain. American policies and actions can still shape the conditions in and surrounding Afghanistan to foster a successful disengagement. Alternatively, the American experience in Afghanistan could turn into a Soviet-style quagmire. What follows is a brief overview of the contemporary situation in Afghanistan. The argument concludes by suggesting how the historical insights outlined above might be applied to enhance the potential for a successful American disengagement.

Cause. Afghanistan's Taliban insurgency remains committed to enforcing Sharia and defending Islam, both of which require the elimination of Western influence.¹ Disrupting education, especially for girls, remains a Taliban favorite target to limit the spread of this influence. In 2006, the Taliban burned down 187 schools, killed 85 teachers, and intimidated 350 schools into closing.² Sharia law and the Taliban's justice-on-the-spot remain popular with the Pashtuns, who despise the existing judicial system's corruption and long delays. The Taliban have brought justice and governance to areas long neglected by President Hamid Karzai's government.³ Additionally, the Taliban exploited the smaller tribes' lack of representation on appointed provincial and district governments to gain recruits.⁴ Proper identification issues also plague the American and Afghan efforts. An Afghan provincial governor described the situation as follows: "Ninety percent of the people you call 'Taliban' are actually tribals. They're fighting for

1. Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 13.

2. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 363.

3. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 362-363.

4. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50.

loyalty or Pashtun honor, and to profit their tribe. They're not extremists. But they're terrorized by the other 10 percent....They're afraid if they try to reconcile, the crazies will kill them. To win them over, first you have to protect their people, prove that the extremists can't hurt them if they come to your side."⁵ Penetrating these closed societies has been very difficult for the foreign troops and members of different Afghan tribes.

Counterinsurgent Vulnerability. The Karzai government has yet to establish legitimacy through population security, economic development, and governmental administration. This has allowed the Taliban insurgency free access to most rural portions of Afghanistan.⁶ Governmental officials do not venture into the rural provinces unless taken there by American or NATO commanders.⁷ President Karzai, himself, lacks a strong tribal support base and has only a moderate personal following among other Afghan elites.⁸ The Afghan government also suffers from a lack of consistent organic revenue to maintain a large security force to face the Taliban opposition.⁹ The most vulnerable weakness might be the developing rift between the Karzai government and its American benefactors. Afghan governmental corruption, American airstrikes' civilian casualties, and policy differences continue to complicate the relationship between host nation and sponsor.¹⁰ Until recently, the United States assigned the Afghanistan war a lower priority than Iraq. The Americans overestimated the long-term effects of their initial victory over the Taliban regime. Like the Soviets, British, Sikhs, Mughals, Persians, Mongols, and Macedonians before them, the Americans learned that entering Afghanistan has been relatively easy but stabilizing the country and securing the population has proved much harder to achieve.¹¹ Additionally, the Americans have also had difficulty managing their relationship with their nominal ally, Pakistan.

Favorable Geography. Afghanistan's vast borders and rugged internal terrain favor the insurgency's decentralized nature. With an area about the size of Texas, almost

5. Quoted in Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 39.

6. Max Boot, Frederick Kagan, and Kimberly Kagan, "How to Surge the Taliban," *New York Times*, 13 March 2009.

7. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 365.

8. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 50.

9. Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 170.

10. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 163-164.

11. Killcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 43-44.

two-thirds of the country lies above 5,000 feet. Mountain ranges bisect the country into many nearly isolated valleys. Most cross-mountain passes are above 10,000 feet and snow-blocked for six months a year. Additionally, the mountains offer numerous cave complexes with hidden entrances for insurgent bases. As a land-locked country, Afghanistan's ethnic tribes occupy both sides of its numerous borders demarcated at the end of the nineteenth century. This facilitates cross-border safe havens and smuggling.¹²

Outside Support. The radical fundamentalist Islamic communities surrounding Afghanistan continue to provide the Taliban material, manpower, and safe havens. Predominantly this support has come from Pakistan's Pashtun inhabitants of the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA).¹³ Pakistan's government has done little to sever its historical ties to the region's Taliban or assist the United States in curtailing cross-border attacks. Former President Perez Musharraf was more concerned about self-preservation than combating the Taliban threat. Doubts linger about Pakistan's claim to have quit supplying the Taliban with arms and intelligence. Despite international pressure, President Musharraf refused pleas to arrest Taliban officials residing inside Pakistan's borders and signed an agreement to legitimize Taliban control of North Waziristan. Taliban attacks in Pakistan have dropped, but inside Afghanistan, their attacks on Afghan, NATO, and American forces have nearly tripled.¹⁴ Iranian sponsorship claims draw support from confiscated Taliban weapons and ammunition. Additionally, some funds transferred to the Taliban are traceable to Iranian origins. Governmental sponsorship, however, is not been publically established.¹⁵ The Taliban also enjoy an influx of finances from their poppy cultivation and ties to international drug cartels.¹⁶

Contemporary Afghanistan presents a complex problem. The tribes' loyalty remains in question. The Karzai government has begun to challenge the Taliban's Sharia law in the rural areas with mixed results. Adjusting their priorities, the American leaders have reemphasized the importance of Afghanistan's stability to their broader national

12. Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 1-4.

13. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 21-28.

14. Rashid, *Decent into Chaos*, 277-278.

15. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 28-29.

16. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 64.

interests. The Pakistan border issue remains unresolved as Pakistani Taliban continues to provide sanctuary and aid to guerrillas in Afghanistan. Near-term actions will determine Afghanistan's future as an American success or quagmire.

Implications for a Successful American Disengagement from Afghanistan

A successful American withdrawal requires substantial military success against the Taliban's guerilla threat. The Taliban's eradication remains unlikely. The necessary measures to bring this about would generate condemnation and resistance from the larger Muslim community. Significantly reducing the Taliban's combat effectiveness, however, constitutes a viable goal. Militarily, this requires continued expansion of Afghani military capability beyond the cities and into Afghanistan's rural tribal areas. Politically, the Afghan government must rapidly follow the stability created by the military effort. Enduring institutions must bind the tribes to the government. Diplomatic pressure must persuade Pakistan to police the FATA region more effectively. When the Taliban can no longer resort to violence above the nuisance level, reconciliation or political inclusion becomes feasible. The appropriate metric is a level of Taliban military capacity that Afghanistan's organic security force can counter.

The vision and reality of a free and autonomous Afghanistan must guide all American decision-making concerning the counterinsurgency efforts. Unlike Vietnam, the Americans must not assume the predominant role if results begin to falter. As American troops surge into Afghanistan, the leaders must ensure the fresh combat power augments the existing Afghan security forces and does not replace the Afghans. Afghanistan must be placed in the lead for all efforts. Karzai's government should continue to assert its role and challenge the United States on policy matters no matter how awkward this seems to be to American political leaders. It must never appear a puppet regime relying on American support to sustain its power. American advisors must continue to prepare Afghan leaders for autonomy and eventual American withdrawal.

Security force development must accompany efforts to improve the government's legitimacy. Hamid Karzai and his ministers can no longer solely focus on building their governmental system while relying on the United States' overwhelming power to police

the remote countryside.¹⁷ Afghanistan's police and army must continue to develop counterinsurgency skills commensurate with the national government's proficiency. Victory requires capitalizing on the reciprocal benefits of the two efforts. Maturing beyond the embryonic stage requires more than on-the-job training. The American forces can continue to provide breathing space while the Afghan leaders attend courses on governance, counterinsurgency policing, and advanced military counterinsurgency techniques.¹⁸ As their proficiency increases, the Afghans must relegate the Americans to supporting roles. Eventually, the American assistance must become dispensable.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai must provide strong political leadership as his government emerges from its infancy. Unlike Diem, the United States must not divorce itself from Karzai's regime over issues concerning policy implementation. His administration deserves the same support that Duarte enjoyed as his government matured, learned from mistakes, and questioned American policies. To weaken pure tribal allegiance in elections, Karzai should establish a political party and encourage opposition parties. Democracy and parliamentary politics require parties to function properly.¹⁹ America and Karzai must continue to embrace elections, similar those in 2004-2005, to further the government's legitimacy. The people must choose between democratic practices and the Taliban's tyranny. Hamid Karzai appears best poised to lead his country through these trying times, though American diplomats in Kabul must also maintain close ties with other emerging political leaders.

In creating Afghan institutions and organizations, the Americans must avoid the pitfall of insisting they mimic those found in the United States. The advisory role must permit the Afghans to build upon their cultural and historic strengths. Functional governance does not require the American solution. Hampering development are the thirty-plus years of insurgent warfare that has plagued Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion. Advisors will have to walk a fine line because former insurgents generally do not make good counterinsurgents without extensive training and education.²⁰ Americans must allow the Afghans latitude to develop and implement their own forms of

17. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 161.

18. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 61-62.

19. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 258.

20. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 60.

governance. More importantly, military advisors must not advance units or tactics that require more support than organically exists. Afghanistan's security force must be distinctly Afghan.

The United States must also ensure the Karzai government or its legitimate successor is fully functional before announcing a timetable for disengagement. American officials must avoid creating the anticipation of a power vacuum that encourages the Taliban or larger tribes to assert themselves. While a foreign power's gradual military withdrawal is a necessary ingredient, the key component proves the inheriting government's ability to fill the void. Enduring stability requires the willingness to continue aid, financial or military, after the host nation gains full autonomy. This will be a key item for the U.S. Congress to note. But ultimately, only a legitimate Afghan administration can allow fulfillment of American goals.

Conclusion

Judging the disengagement's success depends on the host nation's enduring stability, not merely how quickly and smoothly foreign troops depart. Poor decisions prior to withdrawal waste the gains purchased through blood, treasure, and political capital. While no victory template exists, counterinsurgency depends on the government's ability to satisfy the people's needs. In Malaya and El Salvador, the governments' violent beginnings forged strong and stable regimes. These countries continue their legitimate rule and remain friendly toward their benefactors. Aden and Vietnam, however, collapsed shortly after foreign assistance ceased. These governments never developed autonomous legitimacy. Instead, these examples help demonstrate that foreign armies do not win counterinsurgencies. Victory results from an internal capacity to counter threats and govern the population. Effective counterinsurgency assistance requires a comprehensive strategy focused on building that internal capability, coupled with wise policy regarding the timing of disengagement and the maintenance of support.

History demonstrates that successful disengagement by a foreign power from an insurgency is possible. But it also demonstrates the ability to fail. Which course America takes in Afghanistan depends on the wisdom, courage, and vision of both Americans and Afghans. Getting it right will not be easy, but it can happen.

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